

Community Meeting #2 on 4751 Butler Street (Park LV)
Meeting Notes
October 14, 2019 | 6:30 p.m. | St. Mary's Lyceum

1. Overview of Community Process & Ground Rules – LU and LC

Dave (LU) and Lauren (LC) review the community process and ground rules. This is the second community meeting for the site after property owners heard previous comments and came back with a revised plan.

Dave Breingan: Some background: Brett and Phoebe, about a year ago, came out to this meeting to talk about food hall at 4609 Butler Street. They had variances they sought; among them parking. LU and LC in follow up negotiated some conditions to encourage alternatives to personal vehicles for employees and patrons: showers for employees who bike, providing employees with access to the Port Authority Perks program, etc. LC supported that; LU neither supported nor opposed. They got their approval at zoning board and that approval was appealed and overturned in court so they were unable to proceed with the food hall.

Last month, we were here for 4751 Butler Street, an attended parking lot with carousels, and tonight they're presenting revised plans after hearing community feedback.

The zoning hearings for these are separate.

Mike D: Is 4609 dependent on 4751 happening?

- Dave Breingan: That would be a question for the project team later.

Dave: Some follow up from last meeting: we are looking into setting up a parking committee to work on larger issues that this project is bringing to the surface; we've since then been working with the parking authority and city council and mayor's office to reiterate our need to move on solutions specifically on PED (Parking Enhancement District) and changes to RPP (Residential Permit Parking) program. Those conversations are ongoing. Do not have a timeline for implementation right now. Continuing to set up meetings but want to create a larger parking and mobility committee and we are looking to include that into Better Streets Lawrenceville, we've been in touch with them to have a special session where we talk about parking and mobility solutions for Lawrenceville. We can collect everyone's ideas and turn it into a space where we can also rally people to help get those ideas implemented.

Lauren Byrne Connelly ED of Lawrenceville Corp: Just to add, we started looking at shared parking agreements with liability concerns back when I was at LU years ago so we are picking that back up and trying to encourage property owners to make that parking available.

Dave: For 4751 Butler, Brett will talk more about this but zoning relief is administrator exception: corner lot as off street parking, special exception use as commercial parking, and also a variance for surface parking within 10' right of way.

Any other questions before we turn it over to Brett?

2. Presentation from Project Team – Brett Minarik with Park LV

Brett: This is our third ninth ward meeting. Last year, we presented the food hall plan. Zoning board approved, residents approved, but judge said no because of no parking. We were at a crossroads. So we presented the parking carousel plan to you last month for 4751 Butler. We heard a lot of negative feedback. We heard you. We are presenting a revised plan. We have scrapped carousel plan entirely. 4751 Butler today is a vacant, not very attractive corner lot; we noticed several concerns. One being that this is part of a larger problem intersection. Lot is making residents less safe, and a lot of people turned around in it when I was there with a traffic engineer the other day. The carousel didn't go with the aesthetics of the neighborhood and not something people wanted. We hope we can revise those plans and assuage concerns. This is the new plan. We would have one access point. Changes to lot are several: on the multiple curb cuts on Butler and Plummer. We would eliminate curb cuts and have that fenced off with greenery for screening. One curb cut on Plummer and move it back from intersection. Repave and resurface lot. We would repair sidewalks around the lot. It would just have 6 surface spaces, one ADA.

We looked at Studio for Spatial Practice's Butler Street Design Guidelines (recently created through the community process with Lawrenceville Corporation) and incorporated them here, which means also putting in shade trees and benches. The use is consistent with neighborhood. Here I'm showing three parking surfaces on a corner or between two buildings. Screening with greenery. Some even have chain link fences, which we would not have. We think it's an improvement to the current intersection. Not the most attractive intersection with some of the neighboring uses but we want to improve the one corner.

A brief step back to put it in context: 4609 Butler is a beautiful building that is vacant and blighted and the sidewalk is torn up. The building was built in 1890 and there's a tin roof and another 12 feet of wooden rafters. We want to expose all that wood. Play to the craftsmanship of the building. We're a small business who would host other small businesses within that food hall. We would host 5 other small restaurants, have a bar but not be a bar, and have a lot of common space for people to hang out. We would preserve the structure, make it family friendly, and support other folks. This is what we're doing. The parking solution is one element of the parking plan, including a few other mitigation strategies we've been working on.

3. Facilitated Q&A

Alex, 48th Street: I very much appreciate that you took our feedback. It feels heartfelt that you want to make this work. What are the other mitigation options? Do we think those are going to pass you through zoning? Are they sufficient enough?

- Brett: We had a call with the zoning department and we worked out some things like the job perks program with Port Authority, reimburse employee expenses with transportation, cash bonus for biking or walking, offer standing promotions for customers who use Uber or Lyft. The Pittsburgh Business Times recently put wrote about 10 locations that use ride sharing the most and after the airport, numbers 2 and 3 are the casino and Tequila Cowboy. They have seas of parking but still use ride share. We don't want drinking and driving either so ride share incentive is important to us. We hope to get through. Considering last time we went through we were approved with 0 parking spaces, we've modified our plans to bring down our number with these 6 spaces and our mitigation strategies. We do fully expect to be appealed, however, after that zoning hearing.

Patty, 46th: I know you're a new restaurant but why are they telling you that you have to have so many spots? Industry doesn't have any spots. Condado Tacos doesn't have any spots. Why you?

- Brett: The city has minimum parking requirements based on square footage. I don't think there was as much parking pressure back then (when Industry came through), and it's increased and it's become more sensitive. If your restaurant is less than 2400 square feet, it requires no parking at all. This is a 6000 square foot box. If we would separate this into three separate restaurants, we wouldn't have to provide parking at all.
- Lauren: There has definitely been some inconsistency with the zoning code related to parking.
- Dave: For Condado, they're underneath that 2400 sq. ft. mark so they didn't need parking.

Anna, Butler Street: Is there a difference in variance and special exception needs between surface lot and carousel?

- Brett: Operating an actual structure is a separate variance. We now only need one special exception, which is just that surface parking within 10 feet of the street. Almost all of the surface parking I've seen is that way, but it's still a special exception. Less strict than that variance, though.
- Anna: If this proposal were to become reality, it would not be possible for you to put in the carousels anyway?
- Brett: No, we would still have to go through a separate zoning process for that and it's not something we would do, anyway.

Josh, Hatfield St: Let's talk about the curb cuts. You're going to close the curb cuts on Butler and move the curb cut on Plummer? Right now it only takes 3 cars to block up that area.

- Brett: We're moving it further back. Further from the intersection so safer overall. We had the traffic engineer on site to work through changing the curb cuts and the sidewalks and he thought it was a dramatic improvement in safety. Still other problems and those need to be addressed by the City and if another group is willing to improve the intersection we will participate fully. It's just too expensive for us to take the responsibility of the entire intersection.

Kristine: I see the 6 parking spaces, but would this be valet?

- Brett: I don't think so. The idea was to leave it as surface parking and make it available for patrons but reduce operation needs. So theoretically possible other people but don't think it would be as easily accessible.

Mike, 43rd St: By taking those curb cuts off on Butler, you're creating more spots, so instead of giving them up, are you going to make it a quick spot for stuff? A temporary pick up spot would be cool. Like a ride share drop off or loading or something.

- Brett: Good idea, mind if I steal that?
- Mike: Yeah, something like you see in front of Row House or something.
- Lauren: The city would have to look into that, but something we could see.

Rachel, 48th: This is probably not unique but how do you make sure it's only your customers there?

- Brett: At the end of the day we wouldn't 100% know. We would post for it but follow the honor system and we expect people to abuse available parking, of course, but we'll do everything we can to make sure it's our customers.
- Lauren: You'll put where parking is available on your website?
- Brett: Yes, of course!
- Dave: Signage?
- Brett: Definitely posting things like that.

Nan Dowiak: I'm not going to oppose this at all but might be a good idea to start figuring out how far you can bring the street parking. I was going to try to extend paid parking on that block for my store. Now that there's retail going in, I think it might be a good time to look at it all together.

- Dave Breingan (LU): We're interested in this. We're talking to the parking authority and the city. This block is a tricky one because it's part residential and part commercial.
- Nan: Every block is partly residential part commercial, though.
- Dave: Just sort of trickier here because it's residential on the ground floor too. We've been thinking through and meeting with the parking authority about it. I would love to have a longer conversation about this and have this be one of the parking outcomes we work toward.

- Nan: The thing is people forget that there is parking all on Plummer Street that no one ever uses.
- Dave: We also need to have a larger conversation about RPP with all of this of course. Another idea is that the parking authority is trying to pilot a hybrid RPP/paid parking zone. Like near where I used to live on 39th, some streets are empty half the day when people leave for work, but then lots of people come to Arsenal Park for the farmers market, and a lot of people park on 39th for the parents who volunteer at the school, but it's all RPP right now. We could work it out so when we're all away at work, people could park there, and then leave by the time we come home. A hybrid model like that could go a long way. Residents aren't punished but also paid parking is available and we'd be promoting that churn for the business district. To get back to 4751 Butler, are there any other questions?

Q: Did you purchase the property already?

- Brett: We purchased the property.

Jan, 4743 Butler: If you change the zoning variances and open the food hall, does the parking lot exist in perpetuity?

- Brett: If the food hall went out of business and we sold the parking lot, it would be permitted by right to use as a parking lot because it was already approved that way but if they wanted to change it to something else they would still have to apply and go through the zoning board.

Jan: Question for you, Lauren, you mentioned EcoDistricts before, what is that?

- Lauren: It's a type of community planning where it's not just brick and mortar commercial space but looking at how development affects performance. Relating back to the planet and sustainability.
- Resident: Like how there are stormwater planters working outside of Merchant Oyster?
- Lauren: Yes. Putting all those pieces into development.
- Dave: It's a framework for community planning. Like Millvale and their sustainability work.

Q: Are you taking into account things like that? Stormwater solutions, etc?

- Brett: We haven't gotten that far yet but we have taken the advice of Studio for Spatial Practice via their Butler guidelines – for instance, the larger tree pits -- which has dramatically increased opportunities for such things.
- Lauren: The plan he's referencing is LC's. There was a community process around streetscape guidelines that can lead developers to more neighborhood friendly sites, improvements for public realm, etc. You can look at it on our website, or we can send out the link to anyone who wants to see it.

Laurie: 45th: You reduced your seating capacity? You were at 150? Now?

- Brett: Our current seat count is 120, which certainly comes at a cost to us.
- Laurie: The parking is based on square footage not seating?
- Brett: Yes.

Q: This lot would not be attended?

- Brett: No, not attended.

Q: Who will be responsible for managing it? You?

- Brett: We manage that lot. Totally liability is ours. Maintaining the greenery and de-icing, etc.

Q: No fee for people to park?

- Brett: No fee. We'll just post that it's parking for food hall.

Lauren: Lighting?

- Brett: We can definitely work out something that's not too bright for neighbors but I imagine sufficient lighting. That corner is pretty well lit already.

Ray Czachowski: How far away is this from the food hall?

- Brett: 932 feet. 1000 feet is the requirement. So we fit.

Dave Breingan, LU: We spent a lot of time last meeting talking about this property as an imagined gateway to Central Lawrenceville. It could be a nice opportunity for public art too.

- Brett: We would definitely be interested in that. One weird thing: we found this out during our site survey but the very tip is technically not our property; it's city property. Thanks for bearing with us through this whole process, all.

Dave: One last question: timeline. Is your intent to seek approval for this site first?

- Brett: They are separate zoning agenda items but probably at same meeting. Present them back-to-back.

4. Closed Door Community Discussion:

Dave: Just want to thank everyone for their decorum tonight and following the ground rules! A reminder: positions we take: support, support with conditions, neutral, or no support. Next steps: we'll put meeting notes on website. We have a whole section that shows presentations from these meetings. In general what I heard was a lot more approval than last time. A lot fewer concerns. Any other feedback for us?

Comment: This is a great proposal. I would be really bummed if another local business appealed this again. I'm asking for guidance: is there something we can all do to come to the table to make this happen?

- Ray Czachowski: I appealed it last time, it's not enough parking. That's definitely got to be more than 1000 feet away.
- What's the alternative, then?
- Ray: Then he can't open up his business, and that's not my concern. Why should all the residential people pay?
- Comment: I live on 48th Street! I'm a resident too! But he's coming to the table and working with us. More than any other person would.

Nan Dowiak: I don't understand why this has to be considered in tandem with what he wants to do with his restaurant. It's a separate property. Separate business even. My tendency would be neither support or oppose because of the parking. Parking is bad but parking has to exist and as far as someone who's closest to this lot, it's pretty much same as it was with trees. Yay trees, though! Not going to oppose but please decouple it from any discussion from the food hall. We are also agnostic on the food hall.

- Dave: It is separate zoning issues. This parking would go under consideration for the food hall, though. The food hall would not be a factor in whether or not this parking would be approved though.

Nan: Maybe not the best precedence anyway. It's essentially a parking lot now except without trees.

Lauren: As for anyone else who has appealed, we are trying to reach out to have a conversation with them. We will do that. We can't promise that you can change someone's mind but we feel it's a responsibility.

- Comment: Right, because otherwise it sits decrepit. Or another business has to come take it over and we'll have the same fight.

Mike D: 43rd below butler: I think it's safe having a place to park. Wasn't there a lady with a toy store nearby? She might be able to work something out with him, too.

- Nan: That's me, and I wouldn't want to get into it, my business' busiest hour is probably his busiest hour, too.

Jan: Two questions: one is are we putting the cart before the horse? They have to be mutually decided but I guess does he have the variance for the food hall?

- Dave: He was granted for the food hall originally but Ray and The Abbey appealed that which triggered it to higher court and judge ruled that zoning board erred in their approval. They overturned the decision. Because of that overturn, they cannot move forward.

Jan: I guess Brett talked about not most attractive neighbors, I get that he's trying to make it more attractive but it's still parking.

- Dave: Even Brett has agreed that of course there are higher and better uses for the site at 4735 Butler, but with needing to provide parking for the food hall, he feels constrained, for sure.

Lauren: He's looked at so many other solutions, and it just hasn't gotten far. We've tried to help him work through those.

- Dave: Brett made a very earnest effort. He pursued every single option we suggested but not have been able to get a solution (on shared parking) and we're going to try to keep working on it but it is a challenge.

Hunter Stokes, 45th St: I know a lot of businesses on Butler have problems; why don't some of these businesses team up with Teamster's? All those businesses coming here but they shut down at night. Trade it off.

- Dave: Underutilized for sure, so can't we use existing parking smarter? We agree completely and we've tried.
- Hunter: I feel bad but why can't we partner up? Use them for a couple hours and then everyone goes home happy.
- Dave: We agree and we've tried to pursue. Barriers have been liability and other cases. Zoning doesn't make it easy to do that. Shared uses are not really encouraged by zoning. It's important to find the right users. We are trying things like that in the other part of the neighborhood. Arsenal 201 is providing 50 spaces to teachers at the school with the new parking garage they're building. That's a nice symmetrical use because all of the residents are coming back from work at the same time the teachers are leaving. Can we do more? Yes, but barriers. Busy Beaver is a leasing issue. Busy Beaver would love to sublet but they lease the property from someone else and they can't sublet in their current lease. Enforcement also always makes it challenging.

Anna: Echo Jan's point, what Brett has done here is a wonderful compromise. I have two ongoing concerns: general beautification of that spot and I don't think that cars there is the best idea. 6 or 7 cars zooming in and out between 6 a.m. to midnight at a very busy intersection. I'm surprised we haven't gotten into an accident living next to that intersection. A better proposal for sure, but still have a tough time supporting it for those reasons, though.

Jan: A question for Brett, curious to know what traffic engineer had to say. I know that tractor-trailers going into Busy Beaver, have to pull their whole rig back into that lot in order to back in to where they're going.

- Dave: We can follow up on that. Even when we flyer'd for this meeting, we parked in that lot and the curb cuts are unclear. Unclear which way was the entrance, etc.

Nan: We would like to see Plummer become one way. Would fix the death turn.

Corey: 45th Street. Of course there are better things in general but I think the sad thing is no one is going to invest in anything else there. This is going to look prettier with Brett's plans, closing those curb cuts will be better. He's doing a positive thing and trying to provide parking.

Nancy: I love that building (4609 Butler) and I hate the idea that it will sit there and deteriorate if this doesn't go through. I think these folks are going to take care of it. Where it is, I would think it might make foot traffic help. People will see your shop, Nan. I think it'll be a good addition.

- Nan: I don't need a food hall for that.

Anna: Brett and Phoebe got the variance to do this but went to court and was overturned. Couldn't they appeal that decision?

- Dave: I think Brett did evaluate that but he's probably weighing the time it would take, the legal costs, his likelihood of winning and the timeliness of such. It takes a long time. I'm assuming he made the decision that it was best to cut the losses and reevaluate.

Dave: In a larger sense we need to have this conversation about what are we doing around mobility and what are the standards we're holding businesses to. These are some of the natural consequences of that. There are a number of vacant storefronts on that block. I know we're all experiencing the parking crunch. We can work together to find solutions.

Dave: We did a show of hands last time people who were in support or opposition so let's do that again for consistency, in relation to 4751 Butler Street. (Most of the crowd supports. Four or so hands for full opposition. Some neutral.)

Dave: Our process is this goes to our board of directors. For any decisions we make. We share notes and presentations and all of your input.

Lauren: More often than not, we have a joint position on things but there have been times when LC has taken different positions too, we have a board of directors and real estate committee but we try as much as possible to meet LU. We would be reporting back and if we differ in that why and how.

Comments about Plummer & Butler Intersection:

The turn signal at that light, etc. We need to take look at that intersection. Traffic light at 48th and Butler. No turn signal or pedestrian sign. There are lights.

Nan: They pick up speed right there and turning right down Butler is a right turn but they take it as a straightaway. The pedestrians are legally crossing but the cars rush into them. You can only turn from Plummer on. We need to figure out pedestrian only things.

Dave: We've pushed for that in other intersections. 311 is your best bet. You can all help with that. The more the better. They do go through a process. Formalize that. Help us in that advocacy. We can follow up on that and with DOMI.

Kevin: I really do want Brett and Phoebe to succeed. Just for the record I think it's important, 6 spaces 1000 feet away for 120 seat facility isn't going to do anything. We're really basically saying we want them to have this food hall. Just the reality. Second thing is we've talked about what a death trap Butler and Plummer is: just to imagine putting 6 or 7 more parking spaces in an already congested place but the process will work itself out. You gotta remember if you're getting into a car after you drink, and you go right into the fence and into our house. We have a 7-year-old daughter. Imagine if it was your daughter there. Maybe put a better barrier there. Wanna see this and make sure proper safety precautions are in place.

- Dave: We can definitely talk to them about that.

Meeting adjourned 8:00 p.m.