

Community Meeting on Albion Development

Tuesday 11/15/2022, 6:30 PM

In person at Persad Center and simulcast via Zoom and Facebook Live

Meeting Notes

In person: approximately 22 people in attendance. By Zoom: approximately 37 people in attendance. By Facebook Live: approximately 11 people in attendance.

1. **Welcome:** Dave Breingan of Lawrenceville United and Emily Persico of Lawrenceville Corporation welcomed attendees in person, on Zoom, and by Facebook Live. Introductions were made and community agreements were reviewed and agreed to. Dave Breingan noted that Pittsburgh recently lost a housing justice warrior, Celeste Scott, who was instrumental to passing inclusionary zoning in Lawrenceville, which applies to this project, encouraged attendees to donate to her family's fund at bit.ly/PGHForCeleste.
2. **Community Process Overview:** LU and LC reviewed the Lawrenceville Community Process, which projects trigger the process, and clarified that LU and LC aren't part of the development team, did not recruit this developer, and have no authority to intervene in private transactions.
3. **History and Context:**
 - Emily Persico of LC provided some background and context for the site. The development site under consideration today goes in an "L" shape along McCandless & Butler and is currently vacant. The only existing building is the historic firehouse building at the corner, and Albion's plans are to keep that.
 - Emily reviewed relevant community plans, including the Upper Lawrenceville Plan which called for affordable housing, safe & green connections (esp. connections to the riverfront), and a thriving business district with creating a "center" at the intersection of McCandless & Butler to create a critical mass of business traffic (as is, site currently breaks up the business district). Emily also noted the Lawrenceville Neighborway as a safer passage for bikes, Butler Streetscape Design Guidelines which are block-by-block recommendations for streetscape improvements (includes curb bumpouts for safety, accessibility). Finally, the firehouse is over 130 years old and a contributing property to the Lawrenceville Historic District, so that's a priority for preservation.
 - LU and LC had an introductory conversation with the developer in May 2022, followed by an introductory conversation about treatment of the fire station building in July 2022 with neighborhood stakeholders and preservation groups (Lawrenceville Historic Society, Lawrenceville Stakeholders, and Preservation Pittsburgh). The developers had a pre-application meeting with city staff in October 2022, followed by a session with LC's Community Development Committee.
4. **Proposed Development at Butler and McCandless**
 - **Introductions:** Andrew Yule with Albion Residential introduces himself. Has been there 18 years and during that time have worked with Paul Alessandro with Hartshorne Plunkard Architecture (architect on project), who will be working on this project. Have done numerous buildings, including adaptive re-use of historic structures, new construction, high rises, woodframe products – you may be familiar with Morrow Park Apartments at Baum &

Liberty, completed in ~2015. Also development team for South Side City Apartments – developed that and now has new ownership. Purchased Highland House Tower near the zoo: put \$20M into the building, very challenging, existing building. Building was in really bad shape. We love the Pittsburgh market – based in Chicago. We’re a small team, only 9 of us, so we’re very selective. Have projects in Nashville, Pittsburgh, and Chicago, so that’s all we do, and I work soup to nuts on these projects. We’re a long-term owner of assets, we intend to be owner for a very long time. We provide our own capital, our own equity, and our long-term business plan is not to sell. Third party management company – Village Green. Albion runs the asset management, including maintenance, and I will be the point of contact for all of that, including every construction issue and questions from neighbors.

- **Team introductions:** Paul Alessandro (architect): I’m a partner with Hartshorne Plunkard Architecture, which has been around 35 years. We specialize in residential, retail, commercial, hospitality projects, all of which will inform the design here. Also have a specialty specifically in historic preservation. I’m a CMU grad so very excited to be back in Pittsburgh. Andrew notes that HPA has won a lot of awards including Architecture Firm of the Year in 2018 and a lot of adaptive reuse work in Chicago. Weren’t our architect in Morrow Park, but have done wood stick projects to make sure they fit in.
- **About Albion - Andrew:** take a very feminine approach on the interiors, lighter colors. Things that have longevity are important to us because we’re a long-term holder or property – use better finishes and higher quality products. Tend to have a smaller apartment footprint – encourage tenants to live in the community - we have large lobbies to encourage people to get out and mix, and we really focus on making our spaces public so that folks from the neighborhood are using it.
- **About Hartshorn – Paul:** heart of our work is neighborhood building. Started out in Chicago rehabbing old warehouses. Crux of our work is in-fill buildings in neighborhoods. Allow our buildings to live in the community we’re building into and speak to the context – not trying to build the fastest, cheapest thing we can build. Shares examples of their work in other Nashville and Cleveland.
- **About the project – Andrew Yule:** 5-story building, approximately 300 units total, with 10% affordable (30 units) spread throughout the project and will be a mix comparable to the market-rate units.
 - o Parking/mobility: 200 parking stalls, which is right in the middle of the code parking minimums/maximums – Morrow Park project is around .6/.7 ratio (~160 parking stalls for ~200 units). Benefit here is the ability to enhance that with some other traffic calming conditions. We will provide 6-10 dedicated, Albion-branded bikes for our residents to take out and use. EV car charging stations, car share. Will work with City with scooters and bikes, which all helps lower needed parking stalls. Seller of the property owns the whole complex and there’s a lot of parking elsewhere on the site that’s unused that we’ll be able to utilize through an agreement with seller to keeper cars off the streets.
 - o We will have a public lobby – will have opportunities for local PTAs etc to host a meeting. Our team doesn’t stay behind offices, right in front like a hotel. Can walk right in and talk to someone on our team.
 - o Renovating the firehouse building. Will have a dog spa and a public dog run on the back side of the building for the neighborhood to use, carving out an area where everyone from the neighborhood can use, public can use dog wash as well. Security is on site, key fobs, concierge at night, front doors lock down at night. Will have co-

working space in the lobby, sound-proof pods. Coffee shop will be part of the firehouse restoration: want to bring exterior back to an enhanced look.

- Why this project? – Pittsburgh is a very difficult city to create new construction. Weren't super interested in the Strip District – didn't have a strong neighborhood feel. We got to know seller of this property and seemed like a good opportunity to connect a section of a growing neighborhood. Using brick tones and glass, renovation of firehouse, all trying to keep with the feel of the neighborhood. Back of Berlin Way will be a pedestrian/bike path with bollards so cars can't pass through there. Excited to hear more ideas tonight as well.

- **Architecture of the project – Paul**

- Shows image of the project. Fire station at the corner, believe that it's a really important asset and a mark for the building, creating space around it was important to us so that it doesn't feel like it's being eaten by the bigger building behind it. Building is broken up into 3 smaller elements – narrative is that the buildings were built over time and then eventually connected. Existing driveway on Butler Street will become a driveway under the building. First floor will be lobby or retail. Residential building in the back (McCandless) will have sidewalk-level units.
- Floor plans: Increased sidewalk width – bringing a crosswalk across 53rd Street – landscaped items will have benches, planters, increasing the street trees. Bikeway will come through Berlin Way – currently blocked off by a fence, will be a drive through for bikes to get them off of Butler St.
- Plan of the building: Retail on ground floor for east-most part of the building. Drive-through underneath. Following recommendations of Butler Streetscape plan (flat sidewalks). Lobby runs across front of building. Behind all of that is parking, which is accessed via access drive on McCandless. Dog park is behind fire station. Drive to enter second floor parking on McCandless. Second floor: parking lines back of the building, completely hidden from main streets; amenity space. Berlin Way will allow access to parking on first floor for front building. Typical floor plan will have series of balconies, not exactly sure where they'll go but will break up the scale of building. 5th floor roof will have amenity space to look at City and river.
- Elevations: high quality materials, real masonry on the front of the building, lots of glass and windows, and metal structure that connects all the other buildings – picking up some of the details from bridges and mill buildings in Pittsburgh. Goes through views of the building. Connector area between firehouse and our building will have seating, tables, place for pop-up events, street furniture.

- **Community benefits – Andrew**

- We believe in this community and want to invest in it. This site is currently paying nearly zero property tax dollars as empty lots; our structure will generate a lot of property tax revenue. 300 jobs over 20 months, who often will support local businesses after work. Inclusionary zoning: going to accept Housing Choice Vouchers. Public lobby and dog park will be for the neighborhood. Vocational training partnerships: bring in kids from the City to teach about construction, development as professions. General contractor had relationships in unions and was able to sign kids up for apprenticeships who were interested. We strike a lot of deals with local businesses – we're bringing in 400-450 people to support local businesses, which is needed more than ever under COVID. Strive to be good neighbors: we will join all the community organizations, our property manager will come to

neighborhood meetings, love to host community events and meetings to become a part of the fabric. We love artwork – going to use the underpass as a great opportunity for artwork, will have sculpture on site, will work with local artists, try to differentiate ourselves with exterior work. Sustainability: we will be a green building certified, includes stormwater retention on roofs, low VOC paints/emissions, making sure mechanical equip is highest grade of sustainability, EV car charging stations, and bike share program.

5. Q&A Discussion

Q from Jason (resident): What considerations related to construction have been given for Persad Center, as a counseling center serving a very marginalized population, many low-income clients?

- Andrew: Will share my phone number to on-site superintendent. Already had conversations with owner of the building and there will be construction impact. Not excavating below grade, will follow business hours required by the City. Will work with this particular office (Persad) about their particular needs and have direct lines of communication and try to minimize construction impacts. We also do look aheads – construction team will let community know what's happening in next 1-2 weeks and what it means for local stakeholders who are most directly impacted. Promise to try my hardest.

Q From Alison Keating: Instead of trying to have their own branded bikes, they should work with POGOHO to be ready for when they expand the number of stations. Many orgs try to have their own bikes, & it never works.

- Andrew: Yes, we will use both. We will be trying to get a POGOHO Station somewhere near if we can, in addition to ours. I think POGOHO charges – ours are for our residents without fee, but nice to offer both for community.

Q From Alison Keating: Do they expect to charge residents an added fee for parking, or how will it be allocated?

- Andrew: There will be a fee for the parking. We haven't decided what it will be, somewhere near market, will look at local comps. There's a bus station out front so we'll be looking at how to clean that up and enhance that.

Q From Janelle: Will you plan to bring in local businesses to your retail area?

- Andrew: We do, absolutely. It's hard. Lawrenceville has done such a great job of cultivating small businesses, almost no chains. Don't know anywhere in the mid-west like this. I think if a chain showed up, they'd be kicked out of town. Starting talking to local brokers to make sure they get that. Coffee shop will be curated by me personally to make sure it's the right fit for the community. Have ability to have a larger space or several smaller spaces depending on what we hear from community. Don't want to oversell something we have too much of.

Q from Michael Boyle (resident): First, just an observation that there is a coffee shop (Caffe D'Amore) right across the street that's beloved by Lawrenceville, so maybe talk to them before leasing a competitor that could harm their business. Second, is your plan to lease or to own this property?

- Andrew: Purchasing.
- Michael: money is a lot more expensive now than a year ago. Renderings are beautiful. Are your plans impacted by interest rates going up?

- Andrew: We model our budget on a monthly basis based on interest rates today. We provide all our own equity into the project, we don't need to raise money. We're an ESOP and provide our own equity back into the project. Albion part of a larger group called Samins Financial that is life insurance money that we reinvest on behalf of ourselves – don't need to go to the marketplace to find money, which means we can take a slightly smaller return for our stakeholders, which means we can use nicer materials. What we have shown you is not a bait and switch – this is what we're going to build.

Q from Mike Berlisson (Harrison St): Will we have any sort of assurance that as things move forward that plans change and project is no longer viable, say, 12 months from now and if construction has to be halted, we don't wind up with a skeleton of a building – is there any contingency for that?

- Andrew: I have a contract to purchase the land from the seller. Have to go through entitlement process through Zoning and Planning Commission. Due diligence includes financial markets are sound, cost of construction is in range of a successful project. Lawrenceville rents are not the same as parts of New York City and Chicago – can't charge exorbitant rates, can only get what you can get, and we're not in the market to price people out. Morrow Park: we're not even in the top 10 of top rents and we're a block away from a major hospital. Goal is to be occupied, we're not the type of developer to hold out, and we treat the retail the same way, not going to keep it vacant to get the price we want. In terms of a guarantee actually building the property, we do corporate guarantee that we will complete construction once we've gotten a loan – have always used local lenders in the past and will likely do that again. Once we've started construction, we will finish that building. Getting to that point is difficult though as you both have pointed out, but there's light at the end of the tunnel to bring construction costs down.

Q from Anne Davis (22 year resident and member of preservation committee of Lawrenceville Stakeholders): I come in peace but also as a conduit for some architects who couldn't be here. Will read them. Bill Joyce, resident/architect/member of preservation committee: 5/6 stories is too tall, not sensitive to existing context including the fire house. Nothing is even close to that height, will overwhelm everything around it. Keith Cochran, resident/architect/member of preservation committee: looks like another one of these development solely designed for maximum amount of rentable space. Need a break in the canyon wall of building across Butler. Properties across the street will face boring, unending wall. Terrible. How about some breathing room? These buildings are completely overscaled, would prefer a kinder, gentler approach. Paul Calli: two battles – one against density and one against scale. Not sure oversaturation is a bad thing since it seems capacity for residential seems limitless, so let's talk about scale. Scale of ground floor is comically out of proportion to other things in the neighborhood, looks ridiculous on Butler St. Good side: happy that architects haven't tried to break the façade in cutesy, rowhouse chunks to camouflage the scale of the building. Honest but too massive at the scale of the street. Architects seem sophisticated to respond to constructive comments about character of Butler, who just don't understand the context well enough. If they broke down the height of the building at the street with an echelon or two, would be much better. At least this building looks like it's made of real materials.

- Andrew: These are things we talk about every day and it's appreciated, we look at it as the scale and the massing as well. I think density is a good thing. We could go higher on McCandless (could go to 90 feet). We think the scale is appropriate for what this is trying to do for a circumstance of things – cost escalation, price of the land, etc. Open to ways to break up the massing that don't get too cute.
- Paul: We're here to hear these comments. We've thought about a lot of this with breaking down the mass, didn't want to do the cutesy stuff referenced. The question as we were designing was what was on the site before, which was a large industrial site. Looking at it as a transition to things to come with the zoning on McCandless and beyond. That said, open to comments about ameliorating height along Butler, setting back things, etc. In terms of where

the neighborhood is going and where development is going, we have to look ahead and tying things to that and not just what the neighborhood is today.

- Andrew: showing upper story set back along all of McCandless and 70% of Butler. We looked at doing it in all of Butler but started to look institutional. Tricks we can do with grouting, and lentils and windows, landscaping – going to plant mature, bigger trees to make it feel like they've been sitting there a while, activating the lobby takes your eyes off the top. Trying to be cognizant as possible to neighbors.

Q From Kim Autore (resident): Did I see a picture with a rooftop pool?

- Andrew: No pool. That was another, different development project.

Q From Lauren Connelly (resident): When you refer to "Community amenities" are these amenities open to the community or are you referring to the residential community within the complex only?

- Andrew: Some, it's a hybrid. Anything in the lobby, dog run in the back side of the building with connected dog wash, will be public use during the hours of those spaces. Things inside the building on higher floors would be for private use.

Q From Alison Keating: The choice to keep the driveway off of Butler, was that informed by the RIV zoning that disallows larger parking garages?

- Paul: the parking in our building is what's required by code, because we want to keep parking off the street, that drivethrough allows you to get to the parking that's in the back. It's not because the driveway is there, we have more parking.
- Andrew: it's an existing road that was created that we're following and curbing.

Q From Janelle: How will you share the neighborhood space with existing residents during the 20 months of construction?

- Andrew: Will share a construction management plan, will show trucks, deliveries, loading, staging, circulation will work around the site. We will be able to provide that to the community groups and direct stakeholders. There will be no tower cranes or anything of that sort.

Q from Jake (resident): Wanted to express my support for this project. I think it's great. Lawrenceville is an awesome neighborhood, but it's also an expensive neighborhood, and a big part is that more people want to live here than there is housing for. I like that this project brings a lot of new housing to help supply keep up with demand. It's also a big improvement on the existing vacant land. Appreciate inclusion of affordable housing and maintaining the firehouse building, which looks really cool. Don't know much about preservation/design, but encourage you to engage the concerns that were articulated tonight. I generally support this project.

- Andrew: Thank you!

Q from Mary Turak (resident): I'm a Lawrenceville lifer. Your impact on my neighborhood is going to be huge. Anything you can do to increase your parking spots is going to be vital to our quality of life. I'm a nurse and there's often not parking available for me when I get home at midnight. Parking was always an issue, but this is going to impact quality of life for residents so you have to think about that. Other question I have is: I grew up on Harrison Street, and the train goes by every night at 4 AM, and it still does, but I can't imagine living right next door to the train going by in a new building. Also, please don't assume everyone is going to ride a bike.

That's what Mews on Butler said and all those residents park on Butler street because they can't park on their streets.

- Andrew: When we did Morrow Park, we did an agreement that our residents couldn't apply for residential permit parking. I appreciate those concerns. I think today as a developer who does this for a living that our parking count is going to withhold all our residents with some even more opportunity. The world changes fast and this building won't be there for years - not saying parking problems alleviated in years, but it gets a little better every day. I still think within the community itself and the huge parking lot that we're sitting in, that there's plenty of parking that makes sure our residents won't be going onto your streets, and we can write that into their leases. But if you do have issues, you can always call me and I'll work on it. I understand parking is a big issue, it always is. All I can say is I've never had a parking issue at Morrow Park. We will study every parking stall we can squeeze out and deliver as many as we can.

Q from Dan Schlosser (resident on Harrison): there was a note about the original Upper Lawrenceville community plan that called for making McCandless a more center-point of the community. Anything you're doing along the streetscape that was brought up in that?

- Andrew: everything in that plan is included in our drawings. I haven't looked at the extension of McCandless – I think you're right that people wanna get down there and get to the river. Cleaning that up isn't super expensive and we can look at that, that's a good idea.

Q from Lauren Byrne Connelly (resident): will this project trigger a traffic impact study? Have you considering lining up the driveway to 53rd Street? Amount of traffic coming along McCandless and stop signs?

- Andrew: will turn it over to our traffic engineer on the project at CEC, Chris.
- Chris: have been working closely with Dept of Mobility & Infrastructure. Just found out today that we're required to provide a transportation memorandum instead of a traffic impact study. Traffic expected to be 60 vehicles entering/exiting, so it doesn't trigger that.

Q From Tim Schooley (resident and Pittsburgh Business Times reporter): How much retail space will this project be seeking to lease out? And: is the coworking space you alluded to expected to be a resident amenity or will you be offering memberships for those outside? And, please clarify Albion's involvement with the development of Morrow Park and the South Side Works project developments that were led by Jonathan Holtzman and Village Green....Albion was a development partner in those projects then?

- Andrew: Retail is altogether anywhere around 10-12K square feet, could be broken up, and that includes the firehouse as an existing structure.
 - o So Albion was formerly Village Green, that worked under Jonathan Holtzmann, and when two companies separated and went their separate ways. Two totally different companies. I was the developer that worked on those two projects with Village Green.

Comment from David Vatz: I'm the chapter lead of Pro-Housing Pittsburgh. We're a local non-profit that advocates for affordable and abundant housing. High level on this project: things look really great. Love that you're bringing housing to an in-fill lot, not destroying existing housing. Appreciate the affordability and taking feedback from neighbors. Pittsburgh desperately needs more housing – pricing is going up because we're not building enough housing for the number of people who want to be here. There were some comments about scale and size of the building – we like that you're putting a lot of housing in a very desirable neighborhood where a lot of people want to live. Excited to see this come to completion.

Q from Kathy Wills (resident): how many affordable units will there be and how do we access it?

- Andrew: there will be 30. Timing is usually 90 days out. We can let people know ahead of time and explain where to go next. Can work with local community groups and Housing Authority to create a seamless process.
- Dave with Lawrenceville United: we maintain a list to let people know as they come online so let us know if you want to be added to it. These are really highly demanded units.

Q From Tim Schooley: What zoning variances and/or special exceptions will this project be expected to need? And what is the time frame for going through these approvals?

- Bill Sittig (attorney for Albion): Going to be a split zoning lot. Along Butler is a 45 feet height limit in the RIV (Riverfront zone) that's the mixed use district. As you turn the corner going down McCandless it's 90 feet. So we're going to be seeking a height variance. Performance points which allows you to go above that height are not available with the base height, so we flat out need a height variance along Butler. Along McCandless, we're going to be seeking a performance points to go even higher than we're proposing, so the balancing is switching the allowable height and trying to balance the massing. We believe that's the only variance. We're going to need an administrator exception for loading, which is very common, along Berlin Way, which will keep impacts off the neighborhood. We're going to be more efficient with parking in terms of widths to maximize spots, but those won't be public, just the height.

Q From Janelle: Could you speak more to your efforts to manage environmental impact of your development? E.g., building emissions

- Andrew: Did an environmental assessment. Site has already been cleaned up since it was a warehouse. Soil will be taken offsite will be taken into an environmental remediation lot. No environmental impacts out of the typical and ordinary wood frame construction.

Q From Louisa Miller: Thanks for presenting and for incorporating the mobility and public ROW comments from LC. One other thing to consider, it would be great to see more stormwater infrastructure where possible on the ground level - a good example to check out while you're in town is at 42nd/Butler next to Merchant Oyster.

- Andrew: Yes, we will be. We'll be complying with the performance point for storm water management. Rooftop will hold and slowly release water into the City's system. Will check out the project on 42nd. Will be doing some permeable pavers, rain garden, etc.

Q: Will the Amazon distribution center be happening?

- Andrew: can't speak to that, that's out of my league.

Q: When will this be done if all goes well?

- Bill: didn't want to file a Zoning Development Review application before we came here. Will do that within 2 months and there will be public notice of that for the height variance. Got comments back from DOMI then will submit and get on agenda at Zoning Board and then go to Planning Commission. If Berlin Way is determined to be public, we will have to get Art Commission approval. Driveway into Persad

- Center is private – we're not able to align it with 53rd Street, has to stay where it is. Trying to find ways to make it safer, part of Chris's work with DOMI.
- Andrew: I'd love to break ground in 2023. It's probably a two year construction from start to finish at most. But we're inside the building and the outside is done sooner than that.

6. Dave with LU closes out with next steps

- Contact LU at 412-802-7220 or info@LUnited.org. Please sign in at <https://bit.ly/LUSignIn> if you're viewing this afterwards. Will share copy of video and presentation on LU's website. We will contact participants when the Planning Commission and Zoning Board are scheduled.