

**SOUTH SIDE PLANNING FORUM**  
**January 12, 2021 ZOOM MEETING MINUTES**

**Present:** Tom Smith, South Pittsburgh Reporter; Barbara Rudiak, South Side Community Council; Blake McLaren, South Side Slopes Neighborhood Association; Lynn Kurhan, UPMC; Kathy Hamilton-Vargo, South Side Presbyterian Church; Candice Benson, The Brashear Association; and Candice Gonzalez, South Side Chamber of Commerce.

**Visitors:** PA House Rep. Jessica Benham; Bruce Kraus, Pittsburgh City Council; Allison Harnden, City Office of Nighttime Economy; Brosha Tkacheva and Bob Charland, Office of Councilman Bruce Kraus; and Margie Smykla, South Pittsburgh Reporter; and Residents Claire Pro, Terrence Thurber, Joyce Wilbur, and Adrian Smith

**I. Review of Minutes:** Tom Smith called to order the January 12, 2021 Zoom meeting of the South Side Planning Forum at 5:30 p.m. Moved by Barbara Rudiak and seconded by Tom Smith, the minutes of the December 8, 2020 Zoom meeting were approved as prepared by Candice Gonzalez.

**II. Presentations:**

**A. Bruce Kraus, Pittsburgh City Council, and Allison Harnden, Office of Nighttime Economy – City Updates and South Side Parking Enhancement District (SS PED) for December:** Councilman Bruce Kraus reported that the East Carson Street \$16.31 Million construction project is proceeding well and better than he anticipated. The improvements are being made along East Carson Street from the Smithfield Street Bridge to S. 33rd Street. Single-lane traffic restrictions are implemented as needed. PennDOT issues East Carson Street/Route 837 traffic restriction press releases often and they are widely distributed. This construction is expected to be finished in Fall 2021. On another matter, Councilman Kraus reported that the City Department of Public Works (DPW) 4th Division facility redevelopment site work construction is in progress. The Division facility was redesigned with a larger footprint and is expected to be completed before Winter 2021.

Allison Harnden reported that SS PED revenue for December 2020 was \$2,255,20 and there were no Parking Authority costs in December. The January-December 2020 revenue was \$92,126.92 and the Parking Authority costs in 2020 were \$4,287.14. The SS PED trust fund balance as of the end of December was \$234,161.11. As of the end of December, the total revenue collected since the inception of the SS PED in April 2017 was \$678,798.61. Ms. Harnden reported that the SS PED clean team collected 5,176 pounds of trash, removed 14 graffiti/stickers, assisted with 8 hospitality inquiries, and observed 3 homeless issues. Mr. Kraus added that the SS PED clean team will be reduced to one person from January 13-March 31. Ms. Harnden also reported that a second round of Payroll Protection Program federal funds is expected to assist businesses to keep their employees. She said that with more people getting pandemic vaccinations, our businesses will be safer places if we continue the strongly advised precautionary measures.

**III. Old Business:**

**A. Development Activities Meeting (DAM) – South Side Community Council:** Barbara Rudiak reported that as a Registered Community Organization the South Side Community Council (SSCC) organized a DAM meeting on December 17 to hear the presentations and Local Development Committee comments on two projects that will appear before the Historic Review Commission. First, an Excuses Bar renovation proposal at 2526 East Carson Street was presented by Peter Margittai of Margittai Architects. It includes the addition of an outside dining patio and an improved accessible entrance adjacent to the patio. To a question, it was noted that Excuses has been at that location for at least twenty years. Second, a large, artistic abstract mural at 2308 East Carson Street that was already painted was presented along with the artist's meaning and interpretation of the mural. This mural also will appear before the Zoning Board of Adjustments. Ms. Rudiak reported that since July 2020 a total of fourteen SSCC-RCO DAM projects have been presented; 8 to the Historic Review Commission, 4 to the Planning Forum, and 2 to the Zoning Board of Adjustment.

**B. Development Activities Meeting (DAM) – South Side Slopes Neighborhood Association:** Blake McLaren reported that as a Registered Community Organization the South Side Slopes Neighborhood Association (SSSNA) organized a DAM meeting on October 21 to review the South Side Park Master Plan Phase I improvements work planned for April-October 2021. He said that this phase of the park renovation work will include public art.

**C. Neighborhood Plan Committee (NPC):** Tom Smith reported that the Neighborhood Plan Committee (NPC) met at an online meeting on January 7 and agreed it is beneficial to continue keeping the Planning Forum intact after 30 years of meetings and service to the South Side business district and residents. The NPC discussed the City Planning Department's new citywide neighborhood plan, a standardized process that is expected to take 18-24 months for each neighborhood to develop. Discussion ensued. Barbara Rudiak said that South Side residents expect to have a neighborhood plan. After discussion with City Planners Anthony Kobak and Stephanie Joy Everett at the NPC online meeting, it was acknowledged that the South Side has two certified RCOs and strong engagement with businesses, residents, and property owner stakeholders. The City's new neighborhood plan guide envisions such a plan to be in effect

for ten years. It was noted that the South Side does not have a business improvement district nor paid staff. With member organizations, the NPC will explore initiating a new neighborhood plan. Our current South Side Neighborhood Plan was approved in October 2016 and widely distributed both on member organization websites and in hard copy print.

**IV. New Business – Member Organization Reports and Announcements:**

**A. South Side Community Council (SSCC) (RCO):** Barbara Rudiak reported that the next SSCC-DAM meeting is scheduled for January 21 to review two presentations. First, Dollar Bank-South Side Branch at 1712 East Carson Street proposes to move its exterior ATM machine to another existing window closer to the bank's front entrance. Second, proposed exterior renovations at the CoGo's-Coen Markets #1229 at 2401 East Carson Street. On another matter, Ms. Rudiak reported that several South Side residents attended the Planning Forum meeting to voice concerns about issues at Ormsby Park. These residents said there is considerable debris throughout the park, and it creates an unfavorable, unsafe setting for residents, families, and children, who like to frequent the park. Discussion ensued. Councilman Kraus said that he will organize an online Zoom meeting for the concerned parties to further discuss these Ormsby Park and nearby riverfront homeless issues and concerns. Mr. Kraus added that the new City parks tax will help to maintain all City parks.

**B. South Side Slopes Neighborhood Association (SSSNA) (RCO):** Blake McLaren reported that new public art lighting fixtures will be installed on the public steps at the S. 18<sup>th</sup> Street bend with expected grant funds. The old broken light fixtures have been there for years in the elements and will be removed and replaced with the new lighting fixtures during March and April this year. The lighting will be from the ground base up to the second landing. Mr. McLaren also announced that the SSSNA general meeting previously scheduled at 6:30 p.m. following this Planning Forum meeting was cancelled; the next SSSNA general meeting is scheduled for March 9 at 6:30 p.m.

**C. PA Representative Jessica Benham – 36th Legislative District Welcome and Update:** Rep. Jessica Benham, South Side Slopes resident and frequent community volunteer, was welcomed again to the Planning Forum and congratulated as our newly-elected PA representative for part of South Side. PA Rep. Jake Wheatley also represents part of the South Side. At this meeting, Rep. Benham reported that there is a COVID-19 vaccine virtual town hall meeting at noon on Thursday, January 21 that includes the PA House and Senate; the federal Payroll Protection Program is open again for new and second round borrowers; and there is a PA House scholarship program available at [www.tfec.org/scholarships/](http://www.tfec.org/scholarships/).

**D. UPMC Former South Side Outpatient Center:** Lynn Kurhan reported that in the near future the UPMC South Side ambulatory center on Mary Street will administer COVID-19 vaccines for Group 1B, which includes people living and working in congregate care settings and others. Ms. Kurhan said that UPMC is waiting to hear from Governor Wolf if UPMC will be authorized to administer vaccine shots to the community there. To a question, Ms. Kurhan said that COVID-19 testing is conducted at the old UPMC urgent care center and in the UPMC employees parking lot with drive-up service.

**E. South Side Presbyterian Church:** Pastor Kathy Hamilton-Vargo encouraged everyone to pray, pray for all of us.

**F. South Side Chamber of Commerce:** Candice Gonzalez reported that together The Brashear Association and the South Side Chamber of Commerce have agreed to postpone the February 2021 South Side Soup Contest to remain in compliance with COVID-19 pandemic official orders, advisories, and precautionary measures. She also reported that the Welcome Center is open as needed and that Chamber's Clean Team hours have continued to be greatly decreased.

**G. City Snow Angels Program:** The Office of the Mayor provided a summary of January 11-15 initiatives and announcements for distribution through the Planning Forum, including details about snow angels, winter snow operations, appointments project, clean and lien team, avenues of hope, \$7.5M in PA redevelopment grants, URA opportunity fair, Christmas tree recycling, housing assistance resource portal, blue bin information, and URA COVID-19 business resources.

Moved by Kathy Hamilton-Vargo and seconded by Lynn Kurhan, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 6:45 p.m. The next Zoom meeting of the Planning Forum is scheduled for Tuesday, February 9, 2021, at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Candice A. Gonzalez  
South Side Chamber of Commerce