

South Side Planning Forum February 9, 2021 Zoom Meeting Minutes

Present: Tom Smith, South Pittsburgh Reporter; Barbara Rudiak and Mike Clark, South Side Community Council; Blake McLaren, South Side Slopes Neighborhood Association; Mark Bucklaw, South Side Chamber of Commerce, Margie Schill, Brashear Association; Pastor Kathy Hamilton, South Side Presbyterian Church

Visitors: Allison Harden, City Office of Nighttime Economy; Bruce Kraus, Brosha Tkacheva and Bob Charland, City Council Office of Bruce Kraus; Margie Smykla, South Pittsburgh Reporter, Jessica Benham and Madhi Bey, Office of State Representative Jessica Benham; Commander John Fisher, Zone 3 Police; Peter Kreuthmeier, Development Review Committee; Gwen Bolden, Pittsburgh Parking Authority, Chavaysha Chaney, Office of State Representative Jake Wheatley, Gisele Betance, Office of Community Affairs, Anthony Kobak, Office of City Planning, Kitty Vagley and Jeff Neubauer, residents.

I. Review of the Minutes - Tom Smith called to order the February 9, 2021 Zoom meeting of the South Side Planning Forum at 5:35 PM. The minutes were reviewed. Barbara Rudiak made a motion to approve the minutes and it was seconded by Blake McLaren.

II. A. Commander John Fisher, Zone 3 City of Pittsburgh Police - Introduction and Update - Commander Fisher began by sharing that he has been a Pittsburgh police officer for 34 years and, prior to that he was a police officer in Mt. Oliver for one year. He was raised in the South Hills area and is familiar with the neighborhoods that make up Zone 3. He has a well rounded background in law enforcement serving in all 3 branches of the police department - operations, administration and investigations. Law enforcement has been his primary focus. He has a masters degree in criminal justice and, as a sideline, teaches in community college's criminal justice program. Commander Fisher said that his focus is on crime related issues and noted that he has zero tolerance for criminal activity in any community; quality of life issues that may relate to crime; a detriment to your neighborhood that officers can address. He stated that there are issues that the police are not equipped to handle. Police are often the catch all in neighborhoods because people do not know who else to go to. One of his goals is to educate the public to where they can go on issues that are not police related but are affecting quality of life in their neighborhoods. Commander Fisher shared that he has a young complement of officers, along with some young supervisors and he wants to make sure that they, including the older officers, are getting the mentoring they need. He demands that the officers show the public respect even in the face of adversity.

The Commander asked the attendees to share their concerns. Mark Bucklaw shared that the Chamber board feels that police officers on bikes are a good resource and can handle issues that go off Carson Street - noise and public urination. He felt that most

bar owners have control of their patrons while they are in their establishments but there can be problems when they are on the side streets. If what might be considered smaller violations are not address, they are compounded into larger ones. It is often heard - this is the South Side, what do you expect.

Mark Clark, a resident and officer with the South Side Community Council, mentioned that residents have complained about the ATV's - the noise, riding on the streets and sidewalks at all hours. He also spoke about the work that he and other residents do on the Riverfront Trail and how they have appreciated Commander Dixon's understanding that both residents and visitors want to feel safe while on the trail. She made sure that there were patrols on the trail at various times of the day and evening. He spoke about house parties and the need for officers to be required to write a report so that there is follow-up with the residents and universities. Barbara Rudiak, president of the South Side Community Council and member of South Watch, clarified that over the last 3 years Commander Dixon has directed her officers to take reports even if there were no citations written. She would then follow-up with Tim Lewis, Director of Commuter Affairs at Duquesne University and police officers at Pitt so that they could take further steps with the students. Commander Fisher responded by saying that problem properties can be designated as disruptive properties if the problems continue and legal action can be taken. He also said that residents should call 911 when there are problems and, if they are not satisfied with the officers who have responded to the call, the resident can say that they would like to speak to their supervisor. If the officers addressed the problem but it resurfaced a while later, the resident should call 911 again and also ask to speak with the police supervisor.

Mike Clark did ask Bruce Kraus about the status of the substation that had been discussed prior to the pandemic. Bruce said that he had not heard any plans for it to be stalled. He did say that he had met with the Commander and Allison Harnden and discussed the importance of officers being on E. Carson in the early evening since it can set the tone on the street.

Jessica Benham, newly elected state representative, introduced herself to the Commander and mentioned that Zone 3 has incredible community resource officers who, along with Commander Dixon, attended many community events. She considered it critical that residents see officers in a social capacity.

B. Esser's Plaza Update and Funding - Kitty Vagley began her presentation on the Esser's Plaza project with some history. It began almost 10 years ago when SSLDC gave 50K to the SSCC for park updates. Monies were spent on the parklet at 11th and Carson. Although the remaining \$33,000 was set aside for Esser's Plaza, there needed to be additional fundraising. There were fundraisers from the SSCC's spring parties and a grant from the Birmingham Foundation which brought the total to \$50,000. That became the match for the 2020 URA Neighborhood Initiative Fund Award of \$100,000 for the renovation project. She and the committee are working with the URA on that grant and can report that the URA has requested an environmental review from the state. They are also waiting to on a formal determination of CDBG eligibility. Once

those two steps are completed, the contract can be signed and the work can move forward. The committee has been working with Engineers Without Borders (EWB) throughout this process. They worked with their CAD software sufficiently that they were able to put together a permit set of drawings to the city. EWB will also be working with the committee on construction documents. The project also received \$25,000 from the Colcom Foundation which brings the funding for the project at \$175,000. Total cost of the project is \$330,000 which includes a 15% contingency fund. The committee submitted a request for \$115,000 to the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development - Greenway Trails and Recreational Programs funding. That request is currently under review. Kitty asked, that in order to strengthen their request, the Planning Forum could provide an investment of up to \$20,000 for lighting costs at Esser's Plaza. This would allow the renovation work to be done in one year instead of two phases with the accompanying extra charges. This is a time sensitive request in that the state reviewer has asked Kitty to submit all the official funding documents to her by the end of the week.

Tom Smith shared that the Planning Forum has no money and that it could support grant requests but the process but takes a long time. Bruce stated that he asked Kitty to state her need for funds in a public forum and shared that uses of the PED monies have always come through the planning forum. The Parking Enhancement District has strict guidelines as to how the monies can be used - policing, cleanliness and infrastructure improvements and he felt that lighting at the Plaza would be a good use of the funds but he wanted to open the discussion up to PF members. Allison did interject that lighting at the Plaza would not solely be an aesthetic move but also a safety one. Bruce indicated that the PED monies is only funding one clean team member until April and this had resulted in \$13,000 less dollars spent for an additional clean team member over the last few months. He suggested that the PED provide \$15,000 and he would attempt to work with a foundation for the other \$5,000. PF members in attendance thought that the use of the PED monies for the lights at Esser's Plaza was appropriate.

C. Allison Harnden - City Economy Manager - South Side Parking Enhancement District Report - January Revenue and Enforcement Costs - The February Report shows that in January, 2021, \$6,599.39 was generated in parking fees. The total revenue since the PED inception is \$685.398. January enforcement costs were zero and will pick up in March now that all enforcement officers have returned to work. Expenses have been zero although there are outstanding invoices for October - December - at about \$30,000. The PED Trust Fund Balance is currently \$234,161.11 and will receive about \$90,000 more from 2020. There were two alcohol license changes - Smiling Moose has applied for a new brewery license which doesn't require public notice. Polish Falcons is taking their license out of safekeeping. With so many bars and other establishments being closed due to the pandemic, licenses needed to go into safekeeping since they can't be dormant over 90 days. The Clean Team is working with only person - Mike Walker - and he has done an excellent job with the collecting of trash and cleaning graffiti. Mike Clark asked both Bruce and Allison about the type of trash cans and the number of cans on E. Carson as a result of the renovations.

Bruce said that he was unsure but there was a discussion as to whether or not there was a need for cans with sensors since trash was being collected and picked up consistently as a result of the work of the Clean Team. Bruce said that he would contact Bill Crean to find out what was being planned for E. Carson. Allison shared some information about the state of the nighttime economy. There is a second round of payroll protection and many are applying for it. Additionally there are grants (max - 50K) from the state for bar/restaurant owners - from the CARES Act - 145 million that has been in reserve. It will be transferred to the county to be distributed. With these monies, the payroll protection program, an increase of the number of people being vaccinated and spring and summer in our near future, there may be an increase in consumer confidence to frequent bars and restaurants. Employers, however, continue to be worried about the health of their staff. February is a bleak month for service workers; many have been laid off. If anyone is interested in helping workers, they should go to Pgh-RestaurantWorkersAid.org.

Bruce Kraus - City of Pittsburgh Updates - At a previous meeting, Bruce said that he would be more diligent in sharing the E. Carson Street work. (See attachment.)

III. A. Development Activities Meeting (DAM) - Barbara Rudiak, Blake McLaren - Barbara shared that there were two presentations at the January DAM - Dollar Bank is moving its ATM machine closer to the entrance of the bank and signage changes at the former CoGo's Market in the 2400 block of East Carson Street. There was considerable discussion about the signage that would be continuing after the DAM with the LRC, SSCC and hopefully the community. It was felt that this would be the time to speak with residents about the store appeal since this, in addition to gas, is a part of their market. The next DAM will take place on Thursday, February 25th at 6 PM. Three projects will be reviewed - Phase 3 of Riverside Mews; the installation of a garage and door to the rear of 2009 E. Carson Street and changes being made at 1321-1327 E. Carson Street. The storefront that currently houses Glassworx will be changed will become the entrance to apartments that will be renovated on the second and third floors. SSSNA has had no recent DAM's.

B. Neighborhood Plan Committee (NPC) - Tom shared that the NP committee met with our city planners to develop an understanding of the process for putting together a new neighborhood plan. There was consensus that the plan be a plan for all of South Side. The committee learned that it is a long process - 18-24 months. It can be an expensive process also because it cannot be accomplished using just volunteers. Currently there are 5 neighborhoods that are developing their plans so South Side would need to get into the cue. In the meantime, the community needs to think about what our needs/issues are. As we give thought to this, we may be able to engage in some data gathering and analysis. We should also begin looking at Forging-PGH - the city's comprehensive plan that is currently not completed. The city is looking for input into their plan which should be completed in 2021.

IV. New Business - Member Organization Reports and Announcements

A. South Side Community Council (SSCC) (RCO) - Barbara Rudiak reported that the council board members met the day before and discussed what they needed to be focused on for the next few months - this spring and summer being quite different than previous years. The council has put together a survey and will be asking their email list and other members of the community to provide comment to what the council has been doing over the last 5 years, if that work should continue and if other issues need to be addressed. This information can be helpful as we begin discussion around the neighborhood plan. Mike Clark indicated that he would be reaching out to Bruce to discuss in more detail some items that the council has been working on and plans to continue to do so.

B. South Side Chamber of Commerce - Mark Bucklaw reported that over the last year, the Chamber, a member driven organization, has been suffering because of the pandemic. Events that are needed to support the Chamber, i.e. golf outing and the Mingle, had to be cancelled. Plans for a progressive dinner may take place in the spring. In addition, the Soup Contest had to be postponed. A meeting with Brashear took place on Friday, February 5th to discuss a campaign that will launch on February 20th, the day when the Soup Contest would have taken place. The title of the campaign is "It's Not Just About the Soup" and they are looking for donations that would benefit both the Chamber and Brashear. The Chamber plans to involve the restaurants to drive the event via social media. As to the Welcome Center that, along with the barber shop and apartments that were destroyed in a fire the day before the meeting, he mentioned that many have already stepped up to provide support.

C. South Side Slopes Neighborhood Association (SSSNA)(RCO) Blake McLaren shared his concern for the Chamber during this difficult time and offered the SSSNA support whenever needed. Blake shared the work at SS Park is moving forward and fast. URA's Neighborhood Initiative Fund has given Friends of SS Park (FOSSP) to design and engineer an ADA trail on the backside of Bandi Schaum gardens. The SSSNA is donating \$500 for a wetland study that needs to occur before that work begins. There is going to be a pump track that will be built there and FOSSP and Trail Pittsburgh are working together to fundraise. Through the Percent for Art Program, Carin Mincemoyer will be creating most of the public art for SS Park. She created the dandelion art outside of the Brew House.

D. Brashear Association - Margie Schill shared that the organization is working with 211 to help residents in the community over the age of 65 to schedule get their COVID vaccine this coming Thursday, Friday and Saturday. She asked that attendees share the information along with Brashear's phone number - 412-431-2236.

E. UPMC - Lynn Kurhan sent a report that indicated that UPMC continues to administer COVID19 Phase 1A vaccines at the UPMC South Side ambulatory center at 2000 Mary Street. When PA Governor Wolf authorizes it and UPMC has access to the vaccine, UPMC will administer the vaccines for Group 1B, which includes people in congregate settings not otherwise specified as long-term care facilities, persons re-

ceiving home and community-based services, and others as specified in the group. COVID-19 testing drive-up service continues at the old UPMC urgent care center and in the UPMC employees parking lot at S. 21st and Josephine Streets.

F. South Side Presbyterian Church - Pastor Kathy Hamilton-Vargo shared that her hearts go out to those at the Chamber and the others who lost their homes and business. She said that she had spoken with her board this morning and, in addition to prayers, can offer space and other support if necessary.

G. PA Representative Jessica Benham - 36th Legislative District - Representative Benham and her staff expressed their condolences to the Chamber and offered any support that might be needed. In state updates - she participated in a house committee hearing on the vaccine process and asked a number of questions that had been brought up by members of the community. The hearing was recorded and can be accessed by reaching out to her office. Legislation was recently passed to allow the national guard to assist with vaccinations. They will be able to provide administrative help to the Department of Health and local providers with the actual administration of the vaccines. Legislation was also passed to allocate the latest round of federal COVID-19 relief money. There will be about 150 million that will go to local businesses - bars, restaurants, hotels, theaters and other entertainment venues. There is also half a billion dollars for emergency rental assistance. She shared that there will be an upcoming environmental policy event coming up and that she is usually live on Facebook and Twitter on Mondays and Fridays at 5 PM. The legislature is recessed until mid-March so that they can focus on budget hearings. She asked that residents contact her office if there are concerns that she may be able to address.

H. Pittsburgh Parking Authority - Gwen Bolden shared that all the full time officers have returned to work and that Saturday enforcement has begun. In addition, Saturday evening enforcement will begin in March.

Prior to the meeting being adjourned, Bruce provided an update about the building demolition at 1100 E. Carson Street. He also spent time with a couple who had lived in one of the apartments. In addition, he shared a history of the building that James Hill from the mayor's office put together via Pittsburgh History and Landmark's Foundation. The building was built in 1870 which made it 151 years old. It was constructed when we were still the city of Birmingham. It did have a small fire in 1874 but did no significant damage. In 1902 it housed a grocery store and in 1904, George Kissel operated a bar/restaurant there. In 1922 it operated as an illegal speakeasy. In 1930, it became a tire store and in 1963 reverted back to a bar/restaurant. Around the same time, a plan launched - the historical Birmingham Plan which was the first indication of a revitalization of E. Carson Street as the longest historic Victorian business district in the nation. What began at that time and continued into 1974 was the restoration of 3 buildings by PHLF and 1100 E. Carson Street was one of them. It was called "The Victorian" - an Italianate style building. (The other two buildings were the Maul Building and the Economy Market that is home of the Milkshake Factory.) In 1994, all of E. Carson Street was listed on the National Historic Registry as the longest Victorian business

district in the nation and the building at 1100 E. Carson Street played a huge part in that designation. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:00 PM.