

SOUTH SIDE PLANNING FORUM

May 11, 2021 ZOOM MEETING MINUTES

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

Visitors: Bruce Kraus, Pittsburgh City Council; Allison Harnden, City Office of Nighttime Economy; Brosha Tkacheva, Office of Councilman Bruce Kraus; Margie Smykla, South Pittsburgh Reporter; and Giselle Betances, Office of the Mayor.

I. Review of Minutes: Tom Smith called to order the May 11, 2021 Zoom meeting of the South Side Planning Forum at 5:30 p.m. Moved by Barbara Rudiak and seconded by Blake McLaren, the minutes of the April 13, 2021 Zoom meeting were approved as prepared by Candice Gonzalez.

II. Presentations:

A. Bruce Kraus, Pittsburgh City Council and Allison Harnden, City Office of Nighttime Economy – City Updates and South Side Parking Enhancement District (SS PED) for April: Allison Harnden reported that the April SS PED revenue was \$12,956.84. Total SS PED 2021 revenue as of the end of April is \$39,136.59, and \$714,692.08 since inception. April enforcement costs were \$308.80. The SS PED trust fund balance is \$321,259.08.

For April South Side alcohol license changes, Ms. Harnden reported two changes. Loft Lounge, LLC at 1602 East Carson Street has a pending placard posted on April 25, 2021. Controversy at 1635 W. Carson Street, 15219 surrendered a license to safekeeping. For April SS PED clean team highlights, Ms. Harnden reported that the team collected 9,330 pounds of trash, removed 253 graffiti posters and stickers, and assisted with 12 hospitality inquiries. Artie Murphy returned to the SS PED clean team on April 2, making the SS PED a 2-workers team again.

Ms. Harnden reported that the number of graffiti tags in the South Side has increased, and that property owners must request service to have the City remove graffiti or they must remove it themselves. However, graffiti on private property requires waivers from the property owners to have the City remove it. Councilman Bruce Kraus reported that the brick wall along East Carson Street between S. 17th and S. 18th Streets has been a troublesome graffiti spot for many years. He said that he has been in contact with the owner of the brick wall property and obtained permission to have the graffiti removed from the wall. Barbara Rudiak of South Side Community Council said that the brick wall is located in South Side's Historic District and that certain property guidelines would apply if the wall were to be painted regularly or painted with a mural. Ms. Rudiak said that painting a mural on the wall would discourage graffiti tags more than a plain painted wall. Councilman Bruce Kraus said he thinks it would take a year and a half to get a mural approved by the City's Art Commission and secure a visual artist to paint the mural. Candice Gonzalez, executive director of the South Side Chamber of Commerce, said that she has received a number of complaints about the graffiti, litter, and bad behavior of people loitering and panhandling at the wall. She said that she encourages everyone to call 311 and 911 to report their issues. Mr. Kraus expressed concerns about large crowds in the South Side when bars and restaurants open up with reduced orders for pandemic precautionary measures.

For the PennDOT East Carson Street improvements, Mr. Kraus reported that there have been unexpected underground challenges as the work progresses. The work includes major roadway and sidewalk resurfacing, traffic signals, signage renovations and upgrades, ADA ramps, guardrails, and high visibility crosswalks, all extending to S. 33rd Street.

III. Old Business:

A. Development Activities Meeting (DAM) – South Side Community Council: Barbara Rudiak reported that there was no DAM meeting in April. There will be two presentations on May 27th at 6 p.m. The first is the Oliver Bath House. The work consists of the completion of the preservation and renovation of the building, including windows, ingress/egress, code compliance, new mechanical/electrical/plumbing systems, new roof/roof structures, and the removal of the non-contributing penthouse. The second is the property located at 2400 East Carson Street, the former Goodwill building. The project will go before the Historic Review Commission because of changes to the building's exterior. It also will be presented to the City Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) since there are plans to use the vacant lot on S. 24th and Sarah Streets as a parking lot and playground. Currently, it is zoned residential, and the proposed uses are not permitted in a residential district. The lot is also in the Historic District.

In another recent decision, the ZBA denied the variance requests for 90 S. 12th Street. The project was presented before the ZBA board to request approval to build five townhouses at the vacant lot at 90 S. 12th Street. In 2017, the ZBA approved the property owner's request to build a single-family home at this location. This recent ZBA decision indicated that the developer was unable to show sufficient evidence that the change to five townhouses at this location was necessary.

B. Neighborhood Plan Committee (NPC): Tom Smith reported that the Neighborhood Plan Committee has continued to meet and more recently discussed what other organizations should be involved in the development of the new South Side neighborhood plan. Stephanie Joy Everett, the South Side's new neighborhood planner, co-created the City's new neighborhood plan guide that we are now following. The updated new neighborhood plan guide will provide the City's latest new process for neighborhoods to follow. It will include public involvement guidance and identify possible grant opportunities to develop the plan. The updated new neighborhood plan guide will be available in weeks.

IV. New Business – Member Organization Reports and Announcements:

A. South Side Community Council (SSCC) (RCO): Barbara Rudiak reported that the South Side Community Council completed another successful flower sale in time for Mother's Day. She reported that the SSCC received a grant from the Commonwealth Financing Authority for Greenways, Trails, and Recreation Program through the PA Department of Community & Economic Development on April 21, 2021 in the amount of \$129,392 for the Esser's Plaza renovation. Senator Jay Costa provided \$100,000, and PA Representative Jessica Benham provided \$29,392. Ms. Rudiak also reported that on April 24th six South Side flats block watches participated in the Battle of the Block Watches sponsored by PA. Rep. Benham. Winners were awarded with gift cards provided by her office.

B. South Side Slopes Neighborhood Association (SSSNA) (RCO): Blake McLaren reported that the new lighting installation on the S. 18th Street public steps has been completed. He said that the contractor did a wonderful job.

C. UPMC Former South Side Outpatient Center: Lynn Kurhan reported that UPMC is continuing to administer COVID-19 vaccines at their South Side location, and that the demand for vaccines is decreasing.

D. South Side Presbyterian Church: Pastor Kathy Hamilton-Vargo reported that some of the interior space in the South Side Presbyterian Church complex are available for short-term and long-term rent. She welcomes interested individuals, businesses, and groups to contact her at kathysppc@aol.com for more information.

E. South Side Chamber of Commerce: Candice Gonzalez reported that GetGo Café + Market held a presentation event on May 11th at its East Carson Street location when GetGo presented a \$2,500 check as a donation to the Chamber's fire relief fund. This donation will be used to help the Chamber recover from the devastating February 8th fire that destroyed the Chamber's headquarters and South Side Welcome Center.

F. Office of the Mayor: Gisele Betances reported on the Mayor's Office neighborhood initiatives. She said that the City has a temporary moratorium to protect renters from being evicted based on Covid-19 related hardships. For assistance, contact her at Gisele.betances@pittsburghpa.gov. Councilman Kraus asked about the federally-funded S. 18th Street traffic signals upgrade. Ms. Betances said that the contract will be bid in the near future. It will include new traffic signals at Sarah, Jane, Josephine and Mission Streets, as well as Arlington Avenue and Bausman Street. Traffic signal poles will have audible pedestrian countdown safety features.

Moved by Tom Smith and seconded by Lynn Kurhan, the meeting was adjourned at 6:18 p.m. The next Zoom meeting of the Planning Forum is scheduled for Tuesday, June 8, 2021, at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Candice A. Gonzalez
South Side Chamber of Commerce