

The Baxter, Eastown, East Hills Joint Community Meeting

Re: 1201 Wealthy St SE - proposed development

Developer: Steve Bratschie

Agenda

1. Welcome and introduction of neighborhood organization Executive Directors (Don Lee)

- a. Marian Barrera-Young, Baxter Neighborhood Association
- b. Rachel Lee, East Hills Council of Neighbors
- c. Don Lee, Eastown Community Association
 - i. Don introduced the ED's of the other NAs, explaining the agenda for the evening
 - ii. Don asked everyone to hold their questions until the end
 - iii. **Marian Barrera-Young**
 1. What's unique about Baxter? Sits within multiple neighborhoods
 - a. What happens in these neighborhoods affects everyone
 - b. As we move through the process of "cleaning up the neighborhood," it brings things such as development and other interests
 - c. We want these to be inclusive - everyone can take part and be a part of the community - we don't want to exclude anyone
 - d. We need to work with developers on what is truly affordable
 - e. We want our neighborhood to be a diverse mixture, with ethnic backgrounds and culture that can live together in harmony
 - iv. **Rachel Lee**
 1. Leaving soon - volunteering since 2001
 2. Long-time vacant property
 - a. Some promises, but nothing went through
 - b. Property is a corner that binds all of our neighborhoods together
 - i. Eastown on one side; East Hills on another; Baxter on the third
 - ii. What happens on one side of the street affects the other side of the street
 - c. Many believe it's not a historic district
 - i. However, historic districts "grab" both sides of the street

- ii. 1201 Wealthy St SE is within this property
 - iii. Transparent storefronts; not many surface parking lots
 - d. Steve Bratschie (developer) went to the Historic Preservation Committee, then took plans to NAs
 - i. HD gives neighborhoods another layer of “protection” for design
 - ii. Not always the case in proposals outside of HDs
 - iii. We don’t want to “historicize” the site, but make sure it contextually fits the area
 - iv. Materials - taking a look at the type; glazing; windows; etc.
 - e. Important to be open in our dialogue about how this building will affect all of our neighborhoods
- 3. Eastown resident Dan Wells: what is the status of the meeting with the HPC?
 - a. Steve: version we took in was a four-story design. Not supportive of the number of stories, but they supported the design itself. The majority said they would more than like not support a four-story unit.
 - b. Dan: would they be open to a four-story development if the neighborhood supported it?
 - i. Steve: yes
 - c. Dropping to three-story lost square footage

2. Introduction of Developer Steve Bratschie

3. Overview of property’s history and permit requirements (Steve)

- a. Offered to send plans to everyone that wants to provide email address
- b. Resident of GR for 50+ years; lives in East GR
- c. Property became available; client of his (he’s a property broker) came to him about it
 - i. At that time, the property was a Phase I property
 - 1. Required an environmental site assessment - a report prepared for a real estate holding that identifies potential or existing environmental contamination liabilities
- d. Five tanks underground from previous gas station
- e. Has heard a lot about the property; understands the concerns; wants to work with the community on its concerns
- f. His research: looked into MSHDA project

- i. Difficult program to get qualified for financing; explored it - doesn't work because his proposed development is too small
 - ii. Construction costs - \$150/\$160 per sq. ft.
 - iii. Products proposed: brick and wood with glass on main level
- g. Units
 - i. 30 total
 - 1. 22 micro-units
 - 2. 8 studios
- h. Can't make affordable housing work as far as the dollars are concerned
- i. Proposed rent: \$750 - \$1,000/month
 - i. In Steve's opinion, these rent prices "seem affordable for this community"
- j. Onsite parking - complies with City ordinance
 - i. 13 spaces
- k. 3,400 sq. ft. of retail
 - i. Welcomes input - wants local businesses/retail
- l. Originally designed four-story building
 - i. No formal vote; however, majority of HPC said if it was a formal meeting, they would've voted it down (would rather see a three-story development)
- m. Gentrification concerns
 - i. Thinks \$750 - \$1,000 is affordable - eases the gentrification "issue"

4. Attendee Questions

- a. Kathy - Eastown resident - parking concerns
 - i. Happy with three-story proposal
 - ii. Concerns with parking
 - 1. Already issues in that area due to current rental units
 - 2. Many neighbors on that block/in the immediate area don't have driveways
 - 3. Affordable housing - great. Parking issues - a concern.
 - 4. Steve: development is compliant with City requirements
 - iii. Resident response
 - 1. It appears that approximately half of the required spaces were waved
 - iv. Rachel Lee
 - 1. Working with Josh Naramore in looking at how resident parking programs could work within Uptown neighborhoods
 - 2. City is looking at how to make parking more resident-friendly - not many places to go

3. Could this diminish some of the parking issues that we're having?
- v. Resident at 360 Benjamin
 1. Concerns with parking - no driveways on one side of the street
- vi. Marian Barrera-Young - Retail
 1. Where are the retail visitors going to park?
 2. Where are handicap spots?
 3. Steve: there are designated spots for handicap; however, they're not that far in the discussions/direction from the City
 4. Marian Barrera-Young: you should definitely bring up the issues re: parking in this immediate area
 5. Rachel Lee: the residents need to dictate the permit parking discussion; many of the immediate streets could come together to have that conversation
 6. Paul Lee - attendee - can the City do anything to limit number of vehicles/house?
- vii. Resident Lindsey Ruffin
 1. Lives on Logan and Giddings - referenced Eastown Flats building on Wealthy and Giddings/Wealthy and Atlas - no issues (she lives two blocks away)
 2. Ethan Cunningham - resident - lives at Sigsbee and Giddings (one block from south Eastown Flats building) - agreed with Ruffin - no issues with parking
- viii. Don Lee - the ECA is in active conversations with Josh Naramore and the Mobility Department at the City to explore the parking issues and gather information re: the possibility of permit parking in Eastown
- b. Baxter Resident - George
 - i. Asked how the City can actually regulate the number of cars per household
 - ii. Commissioner Kelly
 1. Belknap Hill was the pilot project for the parking permit program
 2. Josh Naramore has gone through Eastown, noting "problem" areas
 3. If one house has six cars, each car owner could purchase six permits (approximately \$30/year) and be guaranteed parking spots
 4. We're in a sensitive time of transition
 - a. We have to encourage other means of transportation

5. Vital Streets - 15 year plan - exciting transition, but it creates these challenges
 6. Much debate happening throughout the City on this topic
- c. Sergio Cira-Reyes - West side resident - affordability
- i. Inquired about Steve's "promise" to keep rent at \$750 - \$1,000
 1. Will that be put in writing? How will the community know what the actual rent will end up being?
 - ii. Steve: I have to run the final numbers; shooting to keep prices in this range
 1. There are a lot of apartments that rent from \$1,200 - \$1,400 in the Grand Rapids area
 - iii. Rachel
 1. Majority of units in proposed development: 321 (studio) - 465 (one-bedroom) sq. ft.
 - iv. Heather
 1. Asked Commissioner Kelly about what is truly "in demand (referring to micro-units)" as far as affordable housing is concerned in Grand Rapids
 2. Commission is being educated on national demographics (people not having as many children; moving away from huge homes - over time, going to see less demand for the larger homes, such as in HH and Eastown)
- d. Josh McBryde - Eastown resident - who will manage the maintenance of the buildings and who will be moving into them?
- i. Such small units; proximity to colleges/universities
 1. If there is lack of maintenance/regulation, probability of issues increases
 - ii. Have you done any demographic research on Eastown? Is there any plan for maintenance/property management?
 1. Steve: would manage himself; has a full-time assistant
 2. Steve: students are not his first choice; obviously can't stop students from renting; will not tolerate noise issues
- e. Resident - why apartments? Why not something else?
- i. Proposed:
 1. Health facility
 2. Gym
 3. Lots of kids in the neighborhood - maybe something for them?
 - ii. Steve: single purpose building would work if something like a St. Mary's health system came to him and wanted to use it; however, a bank won't loan to him on the idea alone
 - iii. Steve: interested in what people have to suggest; if anyone has ideas on businesses, he'd love to see local businesses move in

- f. Dave Jirousek - Easttown Resident - Non-motorized transportation - any accommodation for bikers?
 - i. Steve: yes - bike racks
 - ii. Another resident: don't bike lanes create more congestion?
- g. Rachel Lee - great segue into building setbacks - how is that corner going to come into play?
- h. Resident - what about a four-story development with a lower-level parking ramp?
 - i. Steve: looked at it, but it's very expensive
 - ii. Steve: site also isn't big enough due to the size of the ramp you have to have to go underground
- i. Heather Colletto - Easttown resident - what is current setback from streets?
 - i. Steve: not sure off the top of his head - needs to review
- j. Brandy Arnold - East Hills - what types of businesses?
 - i. Challenge the neighbors on what kinds of businesses they want - businesses that their residents will actually use
 - ii. Referenced Martha's Vineyard - while she, personally, loves it - it's pricey
 - iii. Let's review stores that have everyday items, more affordable
 - iv. Neighborhoods need to put our heads together
 - 1. Come back with a list for Steve
 - v. Affordability: language is important - affordable housing is defined, but we need to be sensitive to the language we're using around this conversation
 - 1. Think about what it *really* means
- k. Josh McBryde - alleyway to east of building
 - i. Looks like parking lot exits to alleyway? Is that going to be street level or is the hill going to stay?
 - ii. Steve: need to work with City on that - would like to pave and improve it - make it more "usable"
 - iii. Resident: City won't pay for that type of improvement
- l. Steve: what do you really *want* to see?
- m. Karla - East Hills resident
 - i. How many spaces for rent on main floor?
 - ii. Steve: nothing set; 3,400 sq. ft.
- n. Courtney Burrows - Easttown resident - what fits best?
 - i. We want to encourage diversity; create spaces where diversity increases, not decreases
 - ii. The rent doesn't necessarily increase the socioeconomic diversity of our neighborhoods
- o. Matt Feyen - Easttown resident

- i. Did you consider full size, one-or-two bedroom spaces to increase the variety of demographic that might move into the building?
 - ii. Steve: micros felt better for both marketing and for the need of the community
 - iii. Steve: two bedrooms are not renting in the City
- p. Courtney Burrows - what is the demographic you are hoping to see in those spaces? How do you plan to meet the hopes of the communities to increase diversity?
 - i. Steve: target demographic seem younger to him; perhaps in college or young professional
 - ii. Steve: someone that wants to be in that neighborhood, but not pay \$1,500/month
- q. George - Baxter resident
 - i. What happens when the younger people get here and then have a family?
 - ii. Steve: I imagine they won't be long-term tenants
 - iii. Resident response: but there are housing concerns, so where do these people go once they want to grow their family?
 - iv. Steve: I'm not sure - I can't answer that
- r. Resident
 - i. Appreciates the design/aesthetic - believes the development will look great when it's finished
 - ii. What kind of community spaces will you provide? Anticipate owners having pets?
 - iii. Steve: inclined to say no to pets; clean up issues/not many green spaces; much wear and tear
- s. Karla
 - i. Would the 13 parking spots go to the residents?
 - 1. Steve: yes
 - 2. Karla: Would there be a charge for parking spots?
 - 3. Steve: probably; approximately \$25
- t. Jim - Heritage Hill resident (Fulton/College area)
 - i. Has development going on next door to his house - having many of these conversations
 - ii. Referenced Waters House Apartments - he had the same concerns re: who will live there and for how long? Owner shared with residents: single bedrooms and have had virtually zero turnover
 - iii. Courtney asked for size comparison
 - iv. Jim: they (WHA) are bigger
- u. Ruth - interior space
 - i. Will you have any say on the interior of the units to make them more "roomy"

- ii. Steve: considered it, but received advice against it because residents might not like it
 - 1. Steve: great advice and will look into it; concerns with longevity
- v. Resident - considered community kitchens, etc.?
 - i. Steve: the question is how do you monitor it? I can't. Not opposed - but I can't be the person monitoring it.
- w. Kathy - Eastown Resident
 - i. Many elderly people want to stay in the city and are attracted to small spaces. Are these accessible spaces?
 - ii. Steve: floated the senior housing concept - not sure if there are dollars available? Handicap showers, etc. Unfortunately, it comes down to cost
 - iii. Steve: one space will be ADA-compliant
 - iv. Kathy: will there be an elevator?
 - v. Steve: yes
- x. Lindsey - green space available (balconies, etc.?)
 - i. Steve: because of the historic district, can't have balconies
- y. Dan Wells - resident
 - i. Voiced support for this project
 - ii. Did a quick calculation on rent paid in 1995 as a single individual
 - 1. Was paying \$650 then, which equates to approximately \$1,000 now
 - 2. Understand that affordability is a major issue
 - 3. This is new construction; can't look at this the same as an existing building
 - 4. This location and concept - believes this is the best option
 - 5. Understands and yields to residents' experience with parking
 - 6. Think it's a good design overall
- z. Resident - gas station there before?
 - i. Yes
 - ii. Steve: thus far, no contamination issues
- aa. Shannon Cunningham - Resident
 - i. Where do we go? Many resounding issues that keep popping up - parking, affordability
 - ii. What do residents want that works for everyone - do we have ideas of what is best for this corner?
- bb. Rachel Lee
 - i. What is a good turnaround time for list of proposed businesses (Steve)?
 - ii. Steve: No rush - not looking to break ground any time in the immediate future

- iii. Rachel: Easttown Community Association, East Hills Council of Neighbors and Baxter Neighborhood Association to prepare a list of suggestions and send to Steve
- cc. Heather
 - i. From a board member's perspective, your voices are critical
 - ii. Asked residents to do the following in regards to this project:
 - 1. Attend meetings
 - 2. Send letters
 - 3. Get signatures
- dd. Rachel
 - i. Steve will be going before the HPC - he will then alter/revise his plans and send to us
 - ii. Our letters of support need to be based on the most relevant plans; otherwise, they become null
 - iii. Many opportunities to write letters, show up, work with your NA
 - iv. Steve is willing to work with residents to hear/learn more
- ee. Courtney
 - i. Heard many parking concerns tonight - is there anything we can do to get that conversation started
 - ii. Shannon Cunningham - ECA Board member
 - 1. Just opened up that conversation again with the City
 - 2. In the stages of gaining as much information as possible in regards to the parking permit and other mobility issues to disperse to residents

5. Thank you

- a. Rachel Lee and Heather Colletto thanked Steve for his time and the residents for attending and for their input