



SQUIRREL HILL URBAN COALITION

SERVING: COMMUNITY • EDUCATION • BUSINESS • RECREATION

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September 28, 2017

Ms. Alice Mitinger, Chair
City of Pittsburgh Zoning Board of Adjustment
200 Ross Street, Suite #3
Pittsburgh PA 15219

Dear Ms. Mitinger

The Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition (the "Coalition") supports the granting of all but one of the variances requested by the applicant under Zoning Case #255 of 2017 for the development of a mixed-use, multi-unit apartment building with commercial spaces on the ground floors and integral parking garage to be located at 5800 Forward Avenue.

The development team, Mr. Herky Pollock of Alderson-Forward Properties LLC, and his architect, Piper O'Brien Herr (POH) has engaged with the Coalition and the community through meetings and direct communication, beginning in June 2017. On July 24, 2017, the Coalition co-hosted a public meeting with Councilman Corey O'Connor at the Jewish Community Center, which was well attended by many neighbors and stakeholders. At this meeting, Mr. Pollock and his design and development team presented the proposed project to the community.

The Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition bases its support of the project and the requested variances as depicted and described in the following;

- Drawings and renderings prepared by Piper O'Brien Herr Architects indicated as "Schematic Design Set" as presented to the SHUC Gateway and Built Environment Committees at a joint meeting on September 12, 2017, findings of which were presented to the SHUC Board on September 19, 2017.
- Information presented or stated at the public meeting on July 24, 2017.
- Email clarifications and communication from Mr. Pollock and his team, and/or POH between June 2017 and today.

The Coalition is enthusiastically supportive of a dense, mixed-use development, which includes both commercial and residential occupancy at this location. The Coalition and community has invested much time and energy in studying this site and overall "Gateway" area via our 1990 Master Plan and subsequent planning, 2009 Gateway Plan, and various studies by students at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU), including through their Remaking Cities Institute in 2014. Our support for the City of Pittsburgh Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and Planning Commission's declaration of this area as a Redevelopment Area, and SHUC's ongoing efforts to continue implementation of the Gateway Plan, demonstrate our consistent and continued focus on improving this important portal to our neighborhood.

One of the most common concerns expressed by the community related to the nine-story height of the proposed design. While there is no clear, objectively "right" answer to that concern, we the Coalition agreed that it warranted careful consideration. The developer and his team have provided additional information per our requests, including drawings and studies showing the proposed building in its context. They have proposed design changes in response to this concern, including a setback of the top story, provision of sidewalk width appropriate for the business district along with additional

setback to the planned ground-floor commercial spaces, and other façade changes that help mitigate the impression of height.

Our own attention and study of this site agrees with the developer's conclusion that density is necessary to make this tight, constrained site physically and financially viable, and to create a critical mass of activity and occupancy necessary to activate this area. Also, we strongly support the inclusion of street-level commercial use and integral parking, which does impact the number of stories. Therefore, we indicate our position on the variance requests as follows:

Variance: 904.02.C maximum lot coverage 90% permitted and 95% requested
maximum FAR 2:1 permitted and 6.5:1 requested
maximum height 45ft/3 stories permitted and 125'10"/10
stories requested minimum 20ft rear setback required and
0ft requested

SHUC supports this variance request

Special Exception: 916.09 waiver of Residential Compatibility

SHUC supports this variance request

Variance: 916.02.B.1 maximum height 40ft/3 stories permitted and 125'10"
requested
916.02.A minimum 25ft rear setback required and 0ft requested

SHUC supports this variance request

Variance: 914.09.F entrance to a garage with more than 5 spaces must have
a minimum 20ft setback from ROW, 0ft requested

SHUC supports this variance request

Variance: 914.10.A 3 loading spaces required and 1 requested
SHUC understands from the development team that this request will be amended to be 0 on-site loading spaces required with the provision of an on-street loading zone, pending DPW approval.

SHUC does not support this variance request.
SHUC does support the provision of an on-street loading zone, located along Forward Avenue and no longer than 50'-0". However, given the density of the development and our concern for pedestrian safety and convenience, we believe an on-street loading zone should supplement the provision of at least one on-site loading zone as well.

Based on this community process, and the information communicated to us by the development team, our support is contingent on the understanding of the project as described below. We request that these points be included as conditions to the variances:

Project Use, Size and Scale

- The project proposes approximately 123 rental apartment units, ranging from studios to 2-bedroom apartments, and including ADA accessible units as per ANSI standards.
- The proposed building will be no more than nine (9) stories above grade, comprised of;
 - Commercial space (restaurant, general or retail, limited) on the ground floor, and possibly portions of the second floor, with at-grade pedestrian entries and access along Forward and Murray Avenues.
- The project proposes approximately 123 on-site/off-street parking spaces in a multi-level parking garage, with vehicular entries at both Forward Avenue and Maeburn Road.
 - The parking garage façade openings (other than entries) will be concealed from the ground floor public right of way at Forward Avenue by the commercial spaces. Other façade openings to the parking garage will be aesthetically screened, such as with trellises or “green screens” meant to support vegetation (that will be maintained), or architectural screens of high-quality, attractive, durable materials. (ex. chain link fencing is not acceptable)
 - A minimum of 43 bicycle parking spaces (or 30% of overall total required vehicular parking) will be provided.
 - A portion of the 123 parking spaces, minimum of 35, will be allocated for use by the commercial tenants (employees or customers) and the general public.

Architectural Design:

The Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition supports the physical variance requests described that accomplish greater density, based upon the specific architectural design responses indicated as “Schematic Design Set” on drawings prepared by Piper O’Brien Herr, presented on September 12, 2017. These include:

- The face of top/ninth floor will be recessed back from the face of the floors below by a minimum of 1’-0”, and will be designed and detailed such that they visually recede.
- Exterior facades to be of high-quality, durable finishes, such as brick, cementitious or metal panels.
 - Brick or stone masonry only shall be used at the first three stories above grade.
- The Forward Avenue façade is designed with vertically-oriented bays of windows and exterior balconies that break up the mass along this façade. The vertical bays are designed to be of contrasting material, proud the main façade, so as to create shadows and variation along the façade.
- The Murray Avenue façade is designed conceptually to be different from the Forward Avenue façade, and to include a colorful, playful fenestration pattern and material accents, inspired by an artful intent. The design idea for this façade should wrap to the zero-lot line south façade so as to enliven what would otherwise be a blank façade above the adjacent Action Housing building.

- No visible or exposed exterior HVAC equipment from public rights of way, including no kitchen or other exhaust toward Forward Avenue or Murray Avenue.
- No visible or exposed exterior trash storage from public rights of way.
- Provision of streetlights and street trees at locations and intervals as recommended by Public Works and the City Forester.
- Sufficient space shall be provided for pedestrians at grade, including a minimum of 18'-0" from curb to primary building façade (recessed under a proposed loggia) at the corner and along Forward Avenue. The building façade should also hold back from the property line along Murray Avenue, no less than 10'-0" at the SW corner, but more along the west façade.
- The project proposes to demolish the existing, abandoned smokestack.
- The project proposes a "right-in/right-out only" parking garage entry at Forward Avenue. The parking garage apron shall be designed such that cars can pull fully off of Forward Avenue before being stopped by a parking gate. The developer will utilize all possible techniques to reinforce compliance with the right-in/right-out only limits.
- We understand from the developer's traffic impact studies, that there will be approximately 59 entering vehicular trips generated by the development in the PM peak hour. We don't believe is a significantly detrimental contribution to the many thousands of vehicles per hour currently passing through this area. We welcome the accompanying economic development that will enable this area to return to a productive use as it was many years ago, but do want safety to be a primary concern.

Community Coordination:

While the topics listed below are not specifically germane to the Zoning variance requests, the community and SHUC have identified their importance to the developer during the community process. The successful resolution of these items as part of the final design is relevant to our general support for the over-arching request of allowing greater density on the site. We therefore use this opportunity to state our expectation of continued, good-faith participation and community engagement with the City and developer regarding the items below.

- We expect continued cooperation between the development team and the City regarding issues of responsibility and structural stability of Maeburn Road.
- We expect the developer to minimize the potential detrimental impacts of the development through careful traffic design and strategies. We encourage the developer to actively support the Complete-Streets design of the Forward-Murray intersection from City of Pittsburgh in order to improve safety and provide the needed multimodal access to the 5800 Forward Avenue development and the other developments being planned and implemented in the area. In addition, the needed traffic and multimodal improvements should be connected with the pedestrian-bicycle facilities already being planned and implemented in the area by the Coalition, the private sector, and City of Pittsburgh.
- We expect the developer to have no detrimental impacts on stormwater infrastructure, but rather improved and careful stormwater design and mitigation efforts
- We expect the developer to cooperate with future coordination of the proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line and stop.

- The development team has stated that the project will be designed to LEED standards, although not pursuing a formal rating. We strongly encourage the developer to pursue a formal LEED rating as an independent, objective means of verifying that environmental design standards are being met and consistent with the relevant City's zoning incentives for doing so.

We the Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition are excited by the prospect of a dense, urban, beautiful development at 5800 Forward Avenue. We believe the community strongly desires a significant, signature project realized after years of vacancy at this site. We will coordinate with the 5800 Forward Avenue development any additional improvements that take place as part of ongoing work on the Coalition's Gateway Plan. In a spirit of cooperation, we request continued participation on the public process for 5800 Forward Avenue, including notification of Planning Commission meetings or other public design reviews or processes. We look forward to a vibrant, important and successful project.

Sincerely,



Lori Fitzgerald, Chair
SHUC Built Environment Committee

cc: Mr. Rich Feder, Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition, President
Mr. Raymond N. Baum, Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition, Immediate Past President
Ms. Marian Lien, Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition, Executive Director
Ms. Mardi Isler, Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition, Gateway Committee Chair
Mr. Corey O'Connor, City of Pittsburgh Councilman, District 5
Ms. Lynnette Lederman, Executive Assistant to Councilman Corey O'Connor
Mr. Alex Phillips, Community Planner, City of Pittsburgh
Ms. Svetlana Ipatova, City of Pittsburgh Zoning Case Review Specialist
Mr. Jack Miller, City of Pittsburgh Zoning Code Administrative Officer