

20-30 West Allen's Lane CDR / WMAN RCO meeting – 8/17/2022

On Wednesday, August 17th, West Mt. Airy Neighbors (WMAN) sponsored a community Civic Design Review meeting to consider a 4-story 76-unit residential apartment building proposed for construction at 20-30 W. Allens Lane (formerly MacLens Autobody). The proposed apartment building would have 68 one-bedroom apartments, 7 two-bedroom apartments, 1 three-bedroom apartment, 26 indoor parking spaces. 11% of the units (8) are intended as “affordable housing units” based on the area medium income. The meeting was mandated by the Philadelphia Zoning Code; however, the purpose of the meeting was informational and not for purposes of obtaining community approval. The proposed apartment building is permitted to be constructed under the current RM-1 Zoning Classification of the property.

The meeting was conducted on Zoom and 43 persons were in attendance including four representatives of the development team (2 of the developers, the architect, and their attorney). The meeting ended by 9:00 PM. Because of the advance notice for the meeting on the WMAN website, several written comments were received before the meeting and forwarded to the developer's attorney. A summary of meeting comments follows:

- 1) There was discussion of the adequacy of 26 off-street parking spaces, especially because the building will be on a busy main artery to and from Germantown Avenue and down the street from the Houston Elementary School. While some attendees supported use of public transport (bus and train services are within walking distance of the property), a number were concerned that having parking for less than 1/3 of the proposed apartment units was a recipe for a parking disaster. The developers stated that they had commissioned a parking study and would share it with the community.
- 2) No one was critical of the number of proposed affordable housing units and a number of persons suggested the project should have more.
- 3) Much of the discussion centered on the architectural design. Of particular concern was the mass of the proposed building, especially that it would dwarf the adjacent properties on Nippon Street and immediately to its west on W. Allens Lane. Neighbors suggested modifications to step back the rear portion of the building. Also, many were disappointed that there was little recognition of the unique architectural details of the homes and apartment buildings in Mt. Airy. The only recognition is using Wissahickon Schist or similar appearing stone veneer for the W. Allens Lane façade of the building (and wrapping around for 10 feet +/-). Others spoke to the exterior façade, which other than the front was described as board and batten (using ‘cement board’), and because of the height and bulk would be unresponsive to the surrounding buildings. Someone suggested painting a mural on the east facade.
- 4) Near neighbors were concerned about the disruption that would result from construction, and lack of any effort to match existing architectural details of the adjacent properties. Comments were also made regarding building security and how exterior lighting might affect neighboring properties. Someone complimented the incorporation of a garden/seating area on the W. Allens Lane front side of the property.

The Developers have promised to review all the comments that were sent to them or made at the community meeting and make themselves available for further dialogue with neighbors. The development proposal must be presented to the City Planning Commission Civic Design Review Committee. The next CDR meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 6, 2022; however, the agenda has not been published. Those interested can inquire at: <https://www.phila.gov/departments/philadelphia-city-planning-commission/public-meetings/>.