



September 2, 2022

Civic Design Review Committee  
[cdr@phila.gov](mailto:cdr@phila.gov)

Re: 20-30 W. Allens Lane  
Application No. #ZP-2022-004845

To Whom it May Concern:

On Wednesday, August 17, 2022, West Mt. Airy Neighbors (WMAN), the designated Registered Community Organization for the referenced property held a community meeting via Zoom. Forty-three persons attended the meeting, including two representatives of the developer, the architect and the attorney for the developer. The meeting lasted approximately two hours and several issues were raised regarding the 76 unit, four story building proposed for this location.

The most critical issues involved proposed off-street parking, architectural exterior design and building set-back at the rear. The developers offered to engage in dialogue with neighbors and respond to the numerous concerns submitted both in writing and orally at the meeting. We are not aware of the extent of dialogue that has occurred, nor of the efforts that have been made to address these concerns. **Consequently, we would strongly urge the Civic Design Review Committee to defer any final recommendation until the development team has had a further meeting, either with the community or with a select group of the affected near neighbors and members of the WMAN Board and Zoning Committee describing measures it has taken to address these concerns.**

1) **Parking:** Only 26 off-street parking spaces are proposed. While it is possible that not all 76 residents of the proposed apartment building will own automobiles, it is likely that there will be considerably more than 26 automobile owners. West Allens Lane at Germantown Ave. is a very heavily traveled local artery that offers on-street parking on only one side of the street. Furthermore, there is a public school a few doors down the street which has limited parking for faculty and administration on school days. Also, the Mt. Airy Neighborhood has many homes that do not include off-street parking for residents, as is the case for the location of this development. **We strongly recommend that additional off-street parking be provided on the property.**

2) **Exterior Design:** Comments were made that the exterior facades failed to recognize the significance of Mt. Airy architecture, which includes many homes built of Wissahickon quarried stone containing late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century architectural detail. The proposed facades on the property only pay slight homage to this history. In fact the front façade of the building looks more like a factory than an upscale multi-family residence. The proposed apartment building will have a noticeable presence from the historic Germantown heart of Mt. Airy and will show a flat boring, unadorned cement board exterior on the non-street facing sides of the building. **We suggest that a more imaginative and compatible approach be used in creating the exterior facades of the proposed building.**

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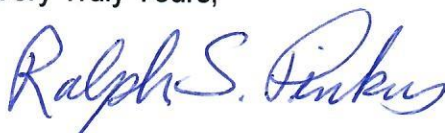


3) **Rear Building Set-Back:** We believe the architect stated at the community meeting that the rear of the proposed building would be set-back 9 feet from the property line, and that windows are proposed on all floors at the rear of the building. The adjoining street, Nippon St. is a narrow one and the properties adjoining the rear property line of 20-30 W. Allens Lane have minimal rear yard area. These neighbors are concerned that they will lose any sense of privacy as well as air and light to their homes. A stepped-back design was suggested for the proposed rear of the building. **The proposed building must provide greater mitigation of the harsh impact it will have on the properties adjoining the rear property line.**

I have attached a more detailed summary of the discussion at the August 17, 2022 meeting which was posted on the WMAN website a few days after the meeting.

**WMAN urges the Civic Design Review Committee ask the developer to address the three concerns in this letter before making any final recommendations.** As designed, the proposed 76 unit, 4 story residential apartment building fails to adequately reflect the desirable characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood through gradual transitions from the adjacent properties.

Very Truly Yours,



Ralph S. Pinkus  
Chair-West Mt. Airy Neighbors Zoning Committee

Attachment

Cc: Adam Laver, Esq. by e-mail  
Carey Jackson Yonce-by e-mail  
Councilwoman Cindy Bass by e-mail  
Charles Richardson by e-mail  
Ruffian Tittmann by e-mail  
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## 20-30 West Allen's Lane CDR / WMAN RCO meeting – 8/17/2022

On Wednesday, August 17<sup>th</sup>, 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/>.