



Spruce Hill Community Association
257 South 45th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

AGENDA

Tuesday, March 11, 2025, 7:30pm

Meeting location:

257 S 45th St and by zoom

Attendance:

In-person: Becca Geller-Puchalsky, Richard Moore, Bridget Lessner, Dave ??, Andrew Richman, Evan Johnstone, Anthony West, Gideon Simpson, Laura Line, Nicole Gawel, Nikol Taylor, Gary Williams

By zoom: Barry Grossbach, Anne Thomforde, Eric Santoro, Libby Rosof, Julie Bush, Linda Cook, Ed Datz, Frank Chance, Jenine Sanzari, Ann Kreidle, Asia Whittenberger, Sylvia Hamerman-Brown, Minesh Shah,

Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes (February)

Motion to approve – Evan, seconded – Eric. Motion to passed.

Quick recap

The meeting discussed the impact of the University of Pennsylvania's real estate development on the neighborhood, the challenges faced by the commercial real estate market, and the current state of commercial operations in University City. The team also discussed the challenges in the retail market, the potential for a historic district nomination in the North section of the neighborhood, and the financial management of donations and sponsorships for the Spruce Hill Community Association and the Spruce Hill Trust. Lastly, the board discussed several topics including public safety concerns, planning for the upcoming Mayfair event, fundraising efforts, and managing the association's social media presence.

Next steps

- Jenine to revisit the invoice details for the historic district nomination work with the consultants.
- Rich to send out a poll to schedule an ad hoc fundraising committee meeting for the historic district project.
- Asia to finalize and circulate community engagement surveys (internal and external) in the next few days.
- Jenine to get information on the number of residential vs. rental properties in the proposed historic district areas.
- Rich to share the spreadsheet of potential donors for fundraising efforts.

- Board members to review the donor spreadsheet and add their names as signatories for organizations they have connections with.
- Julie to gather bird sanctuary materials for a potential Mayfair table.
- Julie to discuss with Monica about having a Spruce Up Committee table at Mayfair.
- Evan to provide Julie with Instagram account credentials for Spruce Hill Community Association.
- Board members to sign up for collecting raffle basket donations for Mayfair.
- Eric to schedule a meeting with Evan regarding safe streets initiatives.

Summary

Penn Dental School Expansion Concerns

The meeting began with the approval of the previous month's minutes. The main topic of discussion was the impact of the University of Pennsylvania's real estate development on the neighborhood. The dental school's expansion plans were discussed, with concerns raised about the loss of commercial space. The speaker, Ed Datz, discussed the challenges faced by the commercial real estate market, particularly in the life sciences sector, due to uncertainties in funding. He also mentioned the growth of multi-family residential projects in the area. The conversation ended with a call for questions and further discussion.

University City Retail Struggles Amid Pandemic

Datz discussed the current state of commercial operations in University City, noting that the retail environment has been impacted by the pandemic. He mentioned that the vacancy rate has increased, with some businesses struggling due to online shopping and a shift in consumer preferences. However, Datz also highlighted efforts to maintain occupancy levels, including the addition of experiential retail and the replacement of some vacant spaces. He noted that the current occupancy rate is around 92%, with a few deals in progress to fill the remaining empty stores.

Retail Market Challenges and Food Industry

Datz discussed the challenges in the retail market, noting that deals are harder to make and capital is constrained. He mentioned that the food and beverage industry in University City remains strong, with Penn aiming to create diversity in offerings. Datz also mentioned that some retail spaces are facing stress, with some doing well and others struggling to attract customers. He clarified that the sushi establishment on 38th Street is temporary and not a model for future storefronts. Datz also mentioned plans for Insomnia Cookies to open a retail location on the Spruce Street corridor and the potential for the Amazon store to move there as well.

Penn's Retail Space Exploration

Ed Datz explains that the university is still exploring options for the space currently occupied by Saxby's, which is set to close in May. He acknowledges the community's desire to maintain a coffee shop in that location but notes that the dental school needs space for a clinic. Barry emphasizes the importance of coffee shops in university areas and the scarcity of such venues in University City. Ed mentions that some coffee shops on campus have struggled, but Saxby's has been successful. Eric Santoro, a neighbor and alumnus, expresses concern about Penn's commitment to retail spaces, noting changes in recent developments and closures of local businesses. Ed responds that Penn still

values retail for its contribution to pedestrian activity but acknowledges that the retail landscape itself has changed.

Retail Challenges and Consumer Behavior

Datz discussed the challenges faced by retail businesses in the area, including increased competition from delivery services and changing consumer behavior. He mentioned that some long-standing retailers have struggled to adapt to these changes, leading to a decline in their business. Datz also highlighted the impact of these changes on the overall retail landscape, with some areas experiencing high vacancies. He emphasized the importance of finding the right mix of retail offerings to cater to the diverse needs of the community.

Penn Students, Donations, and District Nomination

The meeting involved discussions about various topics. The first topic was about the need for Penn students to drink coffee, which was humorously addressed by Barry. Datz then discussed the possibility of conducting a focus group in the next year or two to gather feedback on recommendations. The meeting also touched upon the topic of donations, with SHCA mentioning that they had made one or two donations this month. There was also a discussion about the possibility of having a booth at a race, but it was decided that it might not be a meaningful outreach. Janine updated the team about the progress of the North Spruce Hill District nomination, which is estimated to cost \$34,000. She also mentioned the need for fundraising support. Lastly, Asia announced that she would be sending out a survey to the community and the ad hoc committee in the next few days.

North Historic District Nomination Discussion

The meeting focused on the potential for a historic district nomination in the North section of the neighborhood. The attendees discussed the need for community engagement and public education sessions to gauge interest and address misinformation. They also discussed the importance of understanding the number of homeowners and investment properties in the area. The cost of the historic district nomination process was discussed, with an estimated \$34,000 for the current quadrant. The attendees agreed to tap into the \$64,000 held in trust for the Spruce Hill line to fund the remaining quadrant.

Donation and Sponsorship Financial Management

The meeting focused on the financial management of donations and sponsorships for the Spruce Hill Community Association and the Spruce Hill Trust. The discussion clarified that donations to the Trust are tax-deductible, while sponsorships are not. The team agreed to send thank you letters to donors for tax purposes. The meeting also discussed the process of directing larger donations to the Trust for tax benefits. The team also discussed the online capacity of the Trust to receive donations. The conversation ended with a discussion on the categorization of funds raised through association efforts directed to the Trust.

Zoning Updates and Property Contracts

Barry provided updates on zoning, mentioning that three buildings at Saint Joseph's University are under contract, with potential for residential construction and short-term leasing. Two potential bidders are considering the Mill Creek Garden Site. Barry also noted that the FBI is now involved in the break-ins at Linden. Asia asked about the status of Also Hall, which is under contract. SHCA

inquired about the parking lot at the corner of Chester and 41st, but Barry clarified that it is not under contract.

Spruce Hill Community Association Meeting Summary

The Spruce Hill Community Association board discusses several topics during their meeting. They review the recent public safety meeting, where concerns about auto thefts were raised. The board approves sending a letter of support for a school field rehabilitation project. They discuss planning for the upcoming Mayfair event, including recruiting vendors, organizing raffle baskets, and booking bands. The board also talks about fundraising efforts and the need to reach out to potential donors. The Spruce Up Committee shares plans to table at Mayfair and potentially use Instagram to highlight neighborhood beautification efforts. The meeting concludes with a brief discussion about managing the association's social media presence.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, April 8th, 2025