

Oakland Development Activities Meeting
March 27, 2019, 6 pm
Hosted by OPDC at 294 Semple Street
Project: 3440 Forbes, Wexford Science + Technology

Joe Regan, Executive Senior Vice President, Wexford Science +Technology, began the presentation. See presentation slides on opdc.org. Meeting notes do not describe project details, which are in the slides. Meeting notes record community discussion in a Q & A format, with “Q” indicating Oakland community member. “A” denotes a member of the development team.

Q: Regarding the slide describing how the company works with communities, I like companies that do things for the community, such as STEM education, support for youth programming, education scholarships, etc. Would you meet to discuss this? A: Yes.

Pete Cramer, Director of Development, Wexford Science +Technology, continued the presentation to describe the project. Wexford is early on in process and wants feedback. They have completed concept design, are continuing negotiations with site owner and university partners. Early feedback from Department of City Planning is that they need to reduce the “canyon effect” along Forbes Avenue, integrate with neighborhood character.

Q: What about the use of public spaces in the building? A: can be scheduled and reserved.

Q: Will CVS be in the new building? A: No. The CVS will be moving to the new building under construction now across Coltart at 3420-22 Forbes Avenue.

Q: How many people will be in the building daily once it is built? A: We estimate 200 – 300 sq ft per person. This will be less than 1,000 people in building.

Q: Are you involved in the hydro electricity project on the Allegheny River with Pitt? A: No.

Q: Why have you chosen Oakland as a location for new development when other places need development and Oakland is over built? Oakland’s significant architecture is being overwhelmed by large-scale new construction. Why not spread it out? Why create an innovation district here that will create congestion? A: This is a lab-capable building for scientists at the universities who want to commercialize their science. So, need to be close to university.

Q: Do you own the site? A: No. Murland Associates will continue to own the land. We, Wexford, will have a 99-year ground lease with them. Wexford will build, finance, and operate the new building.

Q: What about sewer infrastructure? What about infrastructure beyond your site? There are old pipes in the city and new development will tax our sewer system. A: We are working with PWSA, and beyond that, I don’t know.

Q: Regarding the community being able to hold meetings in the district hall space in the new building, what portion of time could be dedicated to community needs as opposed to private events? If we would be competing with private paying events, would the community really have an opportunity to use

the space? Would we face a long waiting list to schedule a time? A: How frequently would you want? In our other locations, they are not booked fully long in advance. Our programming partner, Venture Café, could come to discuss with the community details of programming the space.

Q: What part of Philly is your other project? A: University City.

Q: A grocery store would serve the community. A: This is one of many sites in Oakland we'd like to develop. The footprint is tight on this project. We know there is an interest in a grocery store in Oakland.

Q: Iroquois Way is in bad shape. Whose responsibility is it to repair it? A: city responsibility. Wexford would fix what they damage or impact in construction.

Q: Did Pitt reach out to you? How did you get interested in the Oakland neighborhood of Pittsburgh? A: Wexford met Pitt through a connection a few years ago. They have been working with Pitt on their development plans.

Q: So, Pitt is bringing in a developer to do the expansion in the community, and not doing it themselves?

Q: Is your proposed project within zoning requirements? A: Will get to that in the upcoming slides.

Q: Where is diversity in your photographs? A: fair point.

Chris Kenny, Strada Architecture, reviewed slides related to building design and materials.

Q: Louver material? A: Aluminum.

Abby Mountain, Strada, covered the zoning variances the proposed project likely will require. Lot coverage. Waiting for answer from city if just ground floor or calculated on upper floors.

Q: Can you put parking underground? A: at great cost and issue with utilities. We are looking at it, though.

Q: Will you use the parking lot on other side of Iroquois behind your building site? A: No, it is not part of this project.

The floor area ratio, FAR, will be a different calculation if parking is public or lease only. Confusing.

Height will be 59 feet over what zoning allows. To the roof line.

Q: Do you need extra height to make project work or just profit? A: would like this level of activity. Desired size is this size.

Q: Build within zoning codes or do away with zoning.

Q: Everything is negotiable. We should think about each giving a little and everyone benefits. Win - win situations. University not going anywhere so we should get something that would help meet community needs.

Q: How is contextual height calculated? Average of those on the block.

Q: The adjacent hotel is 9 stories over 3 levels of parking. Your floors are taller floors. A: Yes. 15 feet floor to floor to support ductwork for the lab uses.

Q: Do you plan to request that Iroquois be two way? A: no plan to request, but if city says it should be, then they would be fine with that.

Residential compatibility setback. Looking at it. Update as we go along.

Q: Who pays property tax? If nonprofits are in building? A: We will still pay property tax on the whole building regardless of the tenant being for profit or non profit. The ground lease is set up for Wexford to pay the taxes.

Q: Will you provide parking for construction workers? Presently workers are parking on Coltart. A: Will consider an off-site solution to mitigate construction impact.

Q: Additional discussion needed for community benefits. More discussion needed. Development such as this puts more pressure on residents. How do we leverage investment to benefit people put under stress?