

Central Oakland Housing Meeting
December 5th, 2019, 6:00 pm
Hosted by the University of Pittsburgh at 3942 Forbes
Presenter: Mary Beth McGrew, University of Pittsburgh

A meeting regarding the Central Oakland Housing redevelopment was held to clarify the plan and answer questions and concerns from local community members. Sites 6D, Bouquet Gardens, and 3B, Oakland redevelopment, were the main topics of the meeting. The maximum building heights have been reduced to 130 feet and 110 feet, respectively, and the university plans to have a public-private partnership for these housing sites. Community members have voiced concerns regarding lack of open space, affordability, and livability which were all discussed and taken into account by the school. The University of Pittsburgh plans to file for city approval on December 16th.

Q: It has not been our experience that an increase of beds on campus has improved the upkeep/investment/quality of student housing and the reason why is because all the things being constructed are unaffordable and undesirable for students and there's a lack of ability to self-regulate their living conditions. It's a huge concern for students and they voluntarily take up housing that is known to be dangerous, old, and moldy because anything else would jeopardize their living situation financially.

A: Pitt will work with the city in looking at these properties.

Q: People moved out of Bakery Square because they felt that it was soulless. That is what these streets are turning into.

A: We do not think that this looks like Bakery Square.

Q: Will these new housing sites be run similar to Bouquet Gardens?

A: Why not? It could be.

Q: There needs to be something that shows the three sites (Bouquet Gardens, Oakwood Apts., and Posvar) and how they will be working together in tandem because currently they are dealt with as very separate sites within the plan. There should be more concrete plans on how different choices regarding setbacks and open space will then impact the development of the other two sites.

A: Yes we should be more aggressive about our commitment to ensure open space.

Q: The commitment to open space is vague throughout the whole document. I remember that there was a set percentage of open space guaranteed throughout the plan, but now it's gone. We would like that to ensure Pitt's commitment.

A: We don't remember giving a specific metric but I think we should look into that. Some sites would have a very small yield to open space but we think that good design has a relationship with the public realm and we will consider this. Putting out a set percentage would be presumptuous but we would like to set up a metric.

Q: I agree that we can't put set percentages but would it be fair to set some minimums and guidelines by district to ensure that each area is receiving the same amount of open space? It doesn't have to be site by site. We can do this on a more holistic level.

A: I like that but where would you like to see the open space?

Q: We want something in character with the rest of the neighborhood.

Q: Are there any plans regarding the community garden on Atwood that will be demolished by this plan?

A: We will replace it.

Q: One thing to improve Oakland is to make lot owners more responsible for the upkeep of their properties. If something can be done about surface parking lots in general to maintain green space on the perimeter that would be nice.

A: Thanks for that.

Q: I wish that someday Pitt can replace 1 for 1 every house that it had demolished and use the Oakland Community Land Trust to secure housing for homeowners

A: I don't think it's too unrealistic to look into that and study what we can do in partnership with OPDC to begin to look into what makes the neighborhood better and populate the streets with ownership housing.

Q: What will Oakland have to be for Pitt to consider to live there yourself?

A: It's a fair question and I didn't live in Oakland because I couldn't find a house that didn't need renovation so I think that we can use the land trust and Pitt should contribute to make that happen. We want to work with our HR department to incentivize people to be there.

Q: I think you should be addressing affordable housing and I'd like to see a grocery store that doesn't exploit students. There are lots of people in Oakland and I don't see anything other than Forbes Market which is too expensive.

A: We need to entice a grocery store to be in Oakland and the university is sincere in making this happen.

Q: What have community organizations done to work on the grocery store problem?

A: Organizations haven't done that yet but we should have collaboration with the city and the university to find out the real need. The real need of just staple groceries that aren't expensive. Market work can be something we can do together.

Q: Take towers down.

A: We will most likely not be doing that in the near future due to high costs.

Q: There should be more communication with the students about the plan.

A: That is the responsibility of the student government leaders.

Q: The building that we are in (David Lawrence) is really ugly and inefficient. It's an old and useless building with bad design. I'd love to see it taken down or turned into residential because it's a monstrosity.

A: Okay, but that is probably unlikely.

Q: There should be more child-care services to reduce parking pressure, an elementary school, grocery stores, etc.

A: Yes, we agree.