



August 6, 2019

Ms. Christine Quinn  
Permit Services, Licenses and Inspections  
Municipal Services Building, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor  
1401 John F. Kennedy Boulevard  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

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**Re: Civic Design Review for 2157 E Lehigh Avenue (Application No. 939278)**

Dear Ms. Quinn:

Pursuant to Section 14-304(5) of the Philadelphia Zoning Code, the Civic Design Review (CDR) Committee of the City Planning Commission completed the required review of a mixed-use development at 2157 E Lehigh Avenue.

The parcel is just under two acres, bound by Lehigh Avenue to the south, Tulip Street to the east, and Conrail/CSX railroad tracks to the north. The site is zoned ICMX and the proposal introduces a mix of commercial and residential units. 13,325 square feet of commercial will be split between Buildings 1 and 2 on the ground floor while Buildings 3 and 4 will have “tucked under” parking on the ground level. All four buildings propose residential units above the ground floor, totaling 278 dwelling units at just under 235,000 square feet. There are 132 vehicular parking spaces proposed as well as 124 bicycle spaces.

This project has three zoning variances:

- Residential uses are prohibited in ICMX zoning districts.
- Two loading spaces are required, this proposal has zero spaces proposed.
- The max height in ICMX is 60 ft., this proposal requests 75 ft in height.

At the meeting of August 6, 2019, the CDR Committee completed the Civic Design Review process and offered the following comments. These comments also include comments from the first CDR meeting, which took place on June 4, 2019.

**Registered Community Organization (RCO) comments - Somerset Neighbors for Better Living (SNBL)**

The RCO representative expressed overall concern for the project as presented. The RCO representative, as well as several members of the community expressed the following concerns:

- The RCO was initially told that the abandoned, elevated rail infrastructure, a massive retaining wall, was not owned by the developers and thus would not be discussed at the RCO meeting. This information was later corrected by the developers, stating that they do in fact own the wall. The RCO expressed a desire to have

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another meeting to discuss the impact of the wall on the proposal, now that the ownership question was resolved. Generally, the RCO representative stated most of their members would like to see the wall removed. No additional meeting was held with the RCO between the two CDR project reviews.

- The RCO group requested that more affordable housing be incorporated into this proposal, to allow for more mixed income levels for future residents.
- There were several comments regarding Lehigh Avenue's pedestrian safety. Concerns included the Tulip Street curb cut which would further complicate the dark underpass and pedestrian movements along Tulip Street.
- There were other concerns regarding the design of the public plaza, and the design of the additional green space and/or a trail for this project. Some additional comments included general safety and security concerns, and requests for more lighting. The development team responded that the plaza will be controlled at night with a gate at Tulip Street, and lighting is incorporated on the wall and within the overall development.

**Registered Community Organization (RCO) comments - Olde Richmond Civic Association (ORCA)**

- The RCO representative stated that most of their members believe the elevated rail wall is a barrier to connecting the surrounding neighborhoods. The representative asked for more information regarding the structure's safety.
- The RCO stated that the mural has value to many neighbors and that it has a connection to the community, but that if the mural could be relocated, many community members would like to see the wall removed.
- The RCO representative asked if the corner of Tulip Street and Lehigh Avenue could be better activated. He also added that the organization is working on a comprehensive approach for making the underpasses throughout the neighborhood safer.
- The RCO representative asked for more clarity regarding the proposed use on top of the wall, specifically if the linear space is being designed as a trail or a park. Coordination with existing trail planning would be necessary if a trail use is intended.

**CDR Committee**

Overall, the CDR committee members expressed that this proposal has many outstanding questions and issues. The wall's impact on, and relationship with, the public realm needs to be addressed more fully than what is currently proposed.

- The committee and PCPC staff requested that additional meetings be held to address the wall and the newly proposed elevated park. These future meetings should include the community and near

neighbors, council office, Rails-to-Trails, as well as numerous City agencies including PCPC, Streets, and OTIS.

- The committee also requested that the potential for a trail should be further investigated. Several neighborhood stakeholders would like to see a trail incorporated along Lehigh Avenue. PCPC staff requested a trail be incorporated along the rear (north) side of the site to align with adjacent development and existing trail planning. The committee accepted comments from the Rails-to-Trails organization, which underscored how critical this site is in terms of achieving a successful, connected trail network in the future.
- The proposed design for the multi-use side path needs additional consideration. It has great potential for enhancing the public realm through the use of thoughtful materials, plantings, and appropriate safety measures.
- The committee commented that the pedestrian access into the site through Tulip Street needs be more welcoming and celebrated. A more gracious entrance could be relatively small design modification that has a potentially large impact on the public realm.
- The committee would like to see more activity along Lehigh Avenue, and recommended more transparency and activation along the street frontage. This could be achieved if the wall was removed.
- The Committee also requested that a review of potential contamination of the site as it is a heritage industrial parcel.
- Committee members also acknowledged the difficulty of designing for this location is because of the site constraints. Many members appreciated the modest changes that were made between the two CDR meetings.

#### **Adoption of Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC) staff comments**

The CDR committee adopted PCPC staff comments, which included:

- PCPC staff comments stated the wall should be better incorporated into the design or demolished.
- Consider a trail to the northern side of the property to align with other proposed developments, which would help create a buffer between buildings and the active rail line.
- Continue to work with Streets Department and other City agencies regarding the feasibility of the multi-use path along Lehigh Avenue.
- Review the lobby locations for all four buildings, currently the lobbies are auto-focused and located nearest to the parking spaces. Staff recommends relocating them closer to Lehigh Avenue and Tulip Street to further activate the streets.
- Continue to work with all stakeholders and City agencies regarding the proposed elevated wall. If the elevated park is not possible, consider additional pedestrian-oriented amenities.

PHILADELPHIA CITY PLANNING COMMISSION  
CIVIC DESIGN REVIEW

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In conclusion, the Civic Design Review process has been completed for this project. Please contact me if you have any questions about the committee's action.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Sharpe  
Executive Director

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