

Sharswood/Blumberg Choice Neighborhoods
Housing Task Force Meeting #6 (*Final Housing Meeting*)
Tuesday, April 21, 2015
Meeting Notes

At this meeting participants expressed a number of concerns. WRT as the meeting facilitator attempted to capture the sentiment of the conversations but we want to make clear that these are meeting notes and not transcripts of the conversation.

Updates:

Nicholas Dema, PHA

- PHA is in the process of acquiring 500 public and 800 private properties. The Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority (PRA) is leading that effort on behalf of PHA. We are on schedule to complete that process by September 2015.
- PHA is currently working with PHA residents on completing the relocation needs assessments. Those assessments are now 75% complete.
- PHA received environmental clearance for Phase I

Planning Team and Partners Present

- **Beech Interplex** - Non-profit organization based in North Philadelphia that is partnering with PHA to lead the neighborhood revitalization effort
- **PHA** - Philadelphia Housing Authority
- **RES** - Real Estate Strategies (Consultant hired to conduct a residential market analysis)
- **WRT**- Wallace Roberts & Todd (Planning and design consultant hired engaged by PHA to support planning process)

Questions/Answers:

1. QUESTION: What does environmental clearance mean? Has the soil been tested?

PHA ANSWER: HUD has a series of reviews – a check list (i.e., floodplain, flight path, soil check, etc.) that projects must go through before receiving final approval.

2. QUESTION: Does this environmental plan/clearance protect residents during demolition?

There is a concern that construction waste will not be contained and it will negatively affect air quality. How can we be sure that contractors will protect people in the neighborhood? If you look at demographic health data for the neighborhood, a large number of residents suffer from airway related issues (COPD, asthma, etc.). We need to make sure the air is clean and that the quality of work is equal to that of what happens in Center City.

PHA ANSWER: That will be part of the demolition plan and will be handled by the contractors we hire. We understand it's a sensitive issue. We will make sure that the contractors are made aware of the community's concerns and follow requirements.

3. QUESTION: Will there be adequate protection for residents during demolition? In the past this was not handled well.

PHA ANSWER: PHA and its demolition contractors have provided adequate protection during the implosions and removal of debris. During implosion all residents within the immediate target area are relocated, as well as residents in the dust area surrounding and regulated by the City. During removal of debris the debris is watered down and regulated by the City as well.

4.QUESTION: In previous meetings, we've talked about contractors. 1. Will they be using union people? 2. Will the hired contractor have a workforce that reflects the neighborhood?

PHA ANSWER: We are committed to that, we cannot say specifically because we're not at the point where we're selecting contractors yet. There's also a Section 3 provision which requires hiring new workers from within the neighborhood.

5. PARTICIPANT COMMENT: PHA has not been honorable in honoring Section 3 commitments.

6. QUESTION: Who is conducting the household needs assessments? Is this YAP?

Needs Assessments for the CNI Grant are completed, which was completed by PHA staff and residents in the Community Leaders Program. O.R. Colan will refer residents impacted by the condemnation effort who require additional support to YAP.

7. QUESTION: How will the towers come down?

PHA ANSWER: The towers will be imploded and the townhomes will be conventional demolition.

8. QUESTION: When will demolition occur?

PHA ANSWER: Demolition will take place next September/October based on HUD approval.

9. QUESTION: What happens if HUD says no?

PHA will move forward with the off-site program and evaluate the next step for the on-site revitalization.

10.QUESTION: Homeowners are being asked to move using eminent domain. You divided them up and had a separate meeting with them. Gentrification is powerful – and it's ruining our neighborhood. The homeowners are most affected. We need to make sure the homeowners are getting a house for a house. We understand life is about change. However, if you move 100 African American families out – that's a significant impact. You should have a local real estate agent, a local contractor, helping these homeowners. PHA is moving them out, and has moved people out in such a disrespectful manner.

PHA ANSWER: Only residents whose properties were impacted were invited to an informational meeting as required by the law. O.R. Colan is meeting with every one of these residents to determine their relocation needs. Residents who wish to seek assistance from local real estate agents are free to do so. Homeowners are free to hire local contractors to do repairs and rehab, as several sources and programs are available to assist.?

11.QUESTION: Can we get a map and list of the 100+ addresses that are part of the eminent domain list? Is it public?

12. PARTICIPANT COMMENT: You need to file a right to know request to get a copy of the list. I filed a right to know request already and was not given a copy of the list.

13.PARTICIPANT COMMENT: You can call the HUD Hotline and make PHA staff accountable.

14. QUESTION: We live in the Senior building – if we wanted to move into these new homes, can we? There's a fear that you're moving out the poor.

PHA ANSWER: Homeownership or PHA housing? If you qualify you should be able to do so.

15.QUESTION: What are you going to do about the rats, mice, and feces that will come down when you take down the buildings? When the wind blows, it's going to come into our building (the Senior Tower). This is an environmental health issue – are you going to pay our medical bills?

PHA ANSWER: This is something that will need to be addressed with the contractors. There is a substantial extermination plan with each demolition, which is approved by the City and monitored by the City.

16.QUESTION: You're doing 1-for-1 replacement for public housing, but are you willing to do the same for the neighborhood? People who are homeowners are choosing to live here. When you take their property are you willing to make sure they get another house in the neighborhood?

PHA ANSWER: It is up to the individual if they want to stay in the neighborhood. 1-for-1 replacement for homeowners is a timing issue. Depending on when their house is acquired, the new housing may not be built and ready for move-in.

BEECH INTERPLEX ANSWER: This is something we can add to our neighborhood plan. The one thing about this plan is that everything is open. We can add it in and send it to HUD.

17.QUESTION: What about help for homeowners who need to make repairs to their homes?

BEECH INTERPLEX ANSWER: We have been approved for the Keystone R&R Loan to help homeowners in the neighborhood.

PARTICIPANT COMMENT: Those loans are really hard to qualify for they are not really helping us.

18. QUESTION: This is an area with a lot of assets, but how do you expect anyone with a child to relocate to this area when two of our schools were shut down?

RES ANSWER: You're correct, this area has a lot going for it, but the school issue is a problem. We're not from the School District so we can't say why those schools were closed.

19.QUESTION: Is Rental Housing Phase II funded?

PHA ANSWER: We're looking for funding. PHA is committed to ensuring that the plan is implemented. We're also exploring funding through the Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant funding (\$30 million) which is a competitive application. The next Rental Housing Phase II will seek LIHTC and other funding, which will start prior to an application for a CNI Implementation Grant.

20. PARTICIPANT COMMENT: Kelvin Jeremiah said at that meeting in November that PHA can build this without Choice Neighborhoods funds.

21. QUESTION: How close are we to getting a supermarket? Is this for real?

PHA ANSWER: We're in negotiations with ShopRite.

22. QUESTION: What's going to occur at the Bottom Dollar site on West Girard Ave?

RES ANSWER: That Bottom Dollar site will be replaced with an Aldi's.

23. QUESTION: You're going to have all of these folks who currently live in Blumberg with drug/crime issues come right back? Changing neighborhoods is about changing people; not just buildings. If you bring these people right back, in 2 years the new housing will look just as bad as it did before. Some people will be disrespectful regardless. It's not just developing housing but also good management is needed.

PHA ANSWER: Not all of those people will qualify to come back. They will not qualify to live in the new housing with certain types of criminal records, credit issues, no job, and other issues. If you have issues, PHA will be working with residents during the relocation period to help you fix those issues.

24. QUESTION: PHA management and tenant selection is a real issue

RES ANSWER: In other cities – Pittsburgh for example, they've redeveloped all of their public housing with private developers signed on to build and manage the housing. These developers are required to follow the regulations of the housing authority.

Additional Participant Comments:

- PHA is acting like Temple University – gobbling up our neighborhoods
- They’re trying to get rid of people who have lived in the neighborhood for generations
- Last time this eminent domain happened my girlfriend did not want to move they waited until she was at work and tore down her house. How can we trust PHA and PRA?
- You’re moving from PHA housing being consolidated in a compact site (Blumberg) to housing being spread out throughout the neighborhood.
- We want a house for a house. If you move people out of their homes using eminent domain, we want a provision requiring that you find/relocate them to a new house.
- PHA has a poor track record of management of land. Scattered sites are not doing well. They’re not well managed. The city should not allow them to acquire more land that they don’t have the ability to manage.
- How are you going to give a homeowner \$20,000 for their home, then build a new house and sell it for \$100,000+? That’s shuffling; you’re not sharing the wealth.
- Concern that there is a blackout of information about the condemnation/taking process. There was a meeting in January and it was held in private – the community was not informed/invited. We need to be there to support these homeowners. The planning meetings are advertised but the condemnation meetings are not?
- We need to do an assessment to see who wants to come back. This is supposed to be for the neighborhood, but it seems like the only people benefitting are PHA.
- Homeowners are not among the elite poor, we don’t have a subsidy, and we are the taxpayers.
- There is a trust issue. PHA has not gained the community’s trust.
- PHA has used North Philadelphia.
- We need additional meetings to discuss housing. This should not be the last meeting. It feels like you’re pushing an agenda and until there are top-level people from PHA who can answer our questions we should put a pin in this meeting and have a follow-up meeting. Where is PHA CEO Kelvin Jeremiah? Where is Councilman Darrel Clarke? Where is Michael Johns?
- The NTI program reduced the number of households in this neighborhood. NTI decimated this community and nothing that was promised through that program came to fruition.
- You should hire people from the community, local African American residents – all of that money from this grant is not going to our people. I could have done your job. How are we going to lift these folks up when you all are sucking the dollars from our community? The reason we’re poverty stricken is because we’re not getting the money in the hands of the people who need it. You hired a nationally based acquisition/relocation firm (O.R. Colan Associates) where we have people in the community who could have done that work. I’ve helped families with issues like tangled titles and made sure that they can keep their homes. Is a firm from outside of the community going to do that?

- The incomes of the people need to come up; they need those job opportunities and don't say that there are not qualified people in the neighborhood. Richards's Roofing Company has been here for over 30 years.
- Are the open spaces already planned? Where are the parks and gardens going?
- There's nothing wrong with high rise living if it's managed well. Kennedy House, Philadelphia House those are high-rises.
- If PHA is better than they would have better employees and we would get a better product.
- Tenant selection needs to be better handled – there are a lot of situations in the Senior Building – people from area prey on seniors in the neighborhood. Security is not adequate; these people come and go as they please. We have brought up this issue to PHA a number of times and we have not gotten any resolution.
- PHA has been inconsistent with oversight of tenant screening. The tenant selection process is important. A lot of the issues have to do with cronyism of tenant councils – like at Raymond Rosen. They allow residents to stay which leads to crime issues (kids breaking out car windows and business windows, etc.). PHA is a nuisance. I like this process, but after hearing everything I'm adamantly against PHA acquiring any land beyond what they already own. John Street systematically dismantled our community – he tore our neighborhood down. Councilmanic prerogative continues to hurt our neighborhoods. Our only defense is to use the courts to stop PHA. PHA is now in competition with CDCs, but CDCs cannot compete.
- How is this going to benefit people who have lived here for generations, homeowners? What are we getting? Help the people who are already here. We've been coming to these meetings, and you're showing us that you don't respect us – you have a plan and you've had one all along. It's a shame. You're playing games with us.
- PHA is leveraging investments to flip this neighborhood.
- Has PHA and partners looked into other opportunities like – community reinvestment funds, self-financing...?

WRAP UP

WRT as a consultant cannot answer all the questions and address all the concerns that you have raised. We are not engaged in the condemnation process that PHA is undertaking. However what we can do is to document your questions and make sure that the decision makers at PHA are aware of your questions and concerns, we have noted them down and PHA will be holding additional meetings where you can present these concerns and ask questions.

Remember, all of the questions/answers, meeting notes and materials are on the project website.

<http://www.sharswoodblumberg.com/>