

**City of Pittsburgh
Planning Commission
Meeting Minutes**

November 14, 2023 at 2:00 PM, Meeting called to order by Chairwoman LaShawn Burton-Faulk

In Attendance

Chairwoman LaShawn Burton-Faulk
Vice Chair Rachel O'Neill
Secretary, Holly Dick

Monica Ruiz
Peter Quintanilla

Not Present

Mel Ngami

Dina Blackwell

Staff Present

Corey Layman, Zoning Administrator
Andrew Dash
Will Gregory

Kate Rakus, Principal Planner
Katherine Reed
Maryam Moradian-Mosleh
Joe Fraker

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Item	Page Number
Plan of Lots 1. None	
Hearing & Action 1. DCP-ZDR-2023-05221 – 831 E Warrington Ave New Neighborhood Gateway Sign Allentown 2. Continued to November 28, 2023, requested DCP-ZDR-2023-08177 – W. General Robinson St. and Mazeroski Way Major Public Destination Facility Electronic Sign – Large Video Display North Shore	1

A. Approval of Minutes

No minutes for approval.

B. Correspondence (See Attachment B)

Historic Nomination of Frick Park

- Barbara Villanova

C. Hearing & Action

1. DCP-ZDR-2023-05221 – 831 E Warrington Ave New Neighborhood Gateway Sign Allentown
Mr Gregory presented the project for DCP staff. This project is located at 831 East Warrington
Street in the Allentown neighborhood. It proposed a new neighborhood gateway sign for the
Allentown neighborhood with the directional arrow pointing toward Mount Oliver Borough. A
similar sign was installed in Mount Oliver Borough with a directional arrow pointing toward
Allentown. However, since Mount Oliver Borough is outside the City of Pittsburgh there is no
planning commission review for that sign. Existing on the site is a large mural that will remain.
Section 919.03.R(6) of the zoning code states neighborhood gateway signs are subject to
approval by the Planning Commission. A Development Activities Meeting or DAM for the project
was held August 14, 2023, with the Allentown Community Development Corporation, the RCO for
the Allentown neighborhood. A Zoning Board of Adjustment hearing approved a variance as ZBA
Case 160 of 2023. The maximum sign size permitted for a neighbor gateway sign is 40 square
feet; the proposed sign was 70.9 square feet. A staff design review of the project was held July,

2023, and an additional review by the Contextual Design Advisory Panel or CDAP was not recommended. Staff recommended additional study to see how a better fit with the existing mural could be accommodated. Staff also asked whether any consideration had been given to working with the mural artist to incorporate the gateway signage with the mural. At the briefing presentation October 31, the Planning Commission asked the applicants to provide renderings showing some different options for the sign, specifically one moving the sign up and one on the roof. The sign presentation incorporated those renderings. The sign option with a white backing behind it would require a variance since the sign would be larger than the 1.9 square feet approved under the ZBA Case 116 of 2023 decision. Also, a location on the roof would require a different variance per Section 919.01.E.6 which prohibits signs above the roof line or parapet wall of a building. The applicants provided written responses to the review criteria of Section 922.10.E.2. Staff recommended the Planning Commission of the City of Pittsburgh approve Project Development Plan DCP-ZDR-2023-05221 based on the application filed by Fast Signs on behalf of property owners Hilltop Redevelopment, LLC with the standard condition that the final construction plans, including site plans and elevations, be reviewed and approved by the Zoning Administrator prior to issuing the final Record of Zoning Approval.

Ms Meg O'Brien, Director of Economic Development, Hilltop Alliance presented the project. Wayfinding signage between the Allentown and Mt Oliver Borough business districts would join the two areas to raise awareness of the small businesses there. In 2014 economic development support was started in Allentown's business district on East Warrington Avenue. There was a 40% vacancy rate. Through different incentive programs vacancy rate is now 5%. There are now 40 new businesses, and 70 grants have been offered to new and existing businesses in the past few years. Mount Oliver Borough reached out and started working with the Hilltop Alliance on Brownsville Road as well. This wayfinding signage was to help Allentown and Mount Oliver Borough's business districts join to raise awareness about small businesses along East Warrington Ave and Brownsville Rd. The sign for review was the one at the Allentown business district at East Warrington and Arlington Avenues. The other sign was already approved in the Mount Oliver Borough business district at Brownsville Road and Arlington Avenue. Both signs were designed to direct residents and visitors to the nearby business districts.

Ms Barb Plutko, Fast Signs Banksville Road presented slides showing the original proposed placement of the sign on the wall. When it was presented to the board there were concerns with it overlapping the mural. A white backer was added and the sign was moved higher. It could not be moved very far left because wires prevented safe installation with a bucket truck. Slides showed the sign with the backer and without it. Installing the sign on the roof was also proposed but that would require a variance because rooftop signs are not allowed. That ledge is also not very safe, did not have a lot of support, and would have to be refurbished. There were concerns to drilling through the roof to support the sign, voiding the warranty, and possible leaking.

Ms O'Brien presented an example of a recent report with recommendations from 2019 for East Warrington Avenue in Allentown. It specifically stated that neighborhoods reinforce their branding through wayfinding signage. Ms O'Brien showed examples of things to improve branding and the businesses, and also an example of some of the things for community support. Allentown CDC, Hilltop Economic Development Corporation, and property owner RE360 have all approved the design and the placement. It was mentioned at the DAM meeting August 14, and it was shared at the Allentown Business District Committee meeting, as well as the Allentown CDC community meeting in August where there was public support and no opposition. The different depictions came out of some concerns with the muralist. As a result, the variance hearing was scheduled. Chair Burton-Faulk opened floor for public testimony.

Mr Fraker recognized Mr Rick Hopkinson, Mt Oliver Borough Manager & Hilltop Economic Development Corp board member.

Mr Rick Hopkinson expressed his support for the sign. The sign has been approved in Mount Oliver because they started branding these two districts as one big Hilltop business area. The buying power is limited in both neighborhoods. In order for these businesses to be successful it was really important to cross promote because there is something for everyone between these two districts. People from Mount Oliver support Allentown and Allentown supports Mount Oliver. It is much better for the businesses and the districts. He thought the signs provide that branding. He stated they also have quarterly businessowner meetups with Mount Oliver and Allentown. They have mirrored their business support and development programs to be similar across the district. To him this is just the next step.

Mr Fraker recognized Nancy Lomasney, Vice President of Allentown CDC & Hilltop Alliance Board.

Ms Lomasney expressed support for the signage. This location is a perfect place for the signage. Referring to the slide shown by Place Consulting one of their key takeaways from the report was to create a four-hour experience in the Hilltop. That is one of the reasons they felt it is so instrumental to combine branding with Mount Oliver Borough where these two signs create bookends to the Hilltop. Although technically Allentown divides Arlington Avenue, you are not really aware that you're in Allentown until you crest the street at that parking lot where the signage is proposed. That is when you know you are truly in Allentown, if you're lucky enough to know where Allentown is. There is no gateway signage there to identify the neighborhood. It is frequently seen as a drive-thru neighborhood without really being a place to shop and live. It really is a perfect place for the signage that is lacking and has never been able to get off the ground. She strongly supported some signage and bookending the community with Mount Oliver Borough.

Mr Fraker recognized Jen Walzer, part owner of Inner Groove Brewing.

Ms Jen Walzer expressed support for the signage. She stated Inner Groove Brewing is actually located in the building where the sign is proposed, along with the adjacent parking lot. She agreed with the placement on the wall of 831 East Warrington Ave. She also stated she agreed with the previous caller that most folks don't know that Allentown exists on the hill, and that this sign is a great way to get that started and partner with Mount Oliver. The businesses and the borough see a lot of customers from both locations, and she felt it is a great way to connect the two and build awareness for both business districts.

Mr Fraker recognized Kayla Huerbin, RE360, Commercial Leasing Mgr.

Ms Huerbin expressed her support. She fills the commercial vacancies for RE360 in the business district. She stated that talking with prospects in the Hilltop, adding signage is a huge selling point, adding a focal point to where they are in Allentown as well as in Mount Oliver. She couldn't foresee it taking away from the mural at such a high point on the mural.

Mr Fraker recognized Miah Dunkleberger, RE360, Residential Leasing.

Ms Miah Dunkleberger expressed her support for the signage. She heard the plans for this at the last Allentown CDC meeting where she expressed her support. She stated she was aware that this was a call and just wanted to say that from a residential homeowner standpoint in Allentown, it is definitely a top priority and something that the residents would love to see to help make them feel safe. When they have people come to visit it will have that presence that our community can stand behind and say, we are Allentown, we are Mount Oliver. There are plenty of people there that are very proud to live in this community and want it to be more than just a drive-thru community as somebody touched on previously.

Mr Fraker recognized Tyler Abbott, Pres Allentown CDC.

Mr Abbott expressed his support for the sign and stated the CDC has been doing a lot of work in the area over the past five to 10 years to enhance the look and feel of the community's business district on Warrington Avenue. The gateway sign would tie the their previous work and the Mount Oliver and Hilltop feel they are trying to create with the four-hour experience mentioned earlier. He emphasized the importance of this and how great it would make the community.

Mr Fraker saw no other hands raised.

Chair Burton-Faulk asked commissioners for comments or a motion.

Ms O'Neill thanked the team for coming back with the explanation regarding the alternate locations of the signs. She would have liked to see the sign a little higher to the left so as not to interfere with a mural, but understood that because of the placement of the wires that was not possible.

Ms Ruiz stated she drives through this neighborhood, and it would be really nice to see the distinction.

Chair Burton-Faulk asked for additional comments for a motion.

MOTION:

That the Planning Commission of the City of Pittsburgh APPROVES the Project Development Plan DCP-ZDR-2023-05221 based on the application filed by Barb Plutko of Fast Signs on behalf of Hilltop Redevelopment LLC, the property owners, with the following conditions:

1. The final construction plans, including site plans and elevations shall be reviewed and approved by the Zoning Administrator prior to issuing the final Record of Zoning Approval.

MOVED BY: Ms Dick
SECONDED BY: Mr Quintanilla

IN FAVOR: Ms Burton-Faulk, Ms Dick, Ms O'Neill, Ms Ruiz, Mr Quintanilla
CARRIED

D. Director's Report

No Report.

E. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:28 PM.

Approved by: Secretary

Disclaimer

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