

Development Activities Meeting Report (Version: 06/24/2020)

This report created by the Neighborhood Planner and included with staff reports to City Boards and/or Commissions.

Logistics	Stakeholders
Project Name/Address: 3990 Fifth Ave / Bruce & Brackenridge Halls historic facade repairs	Groups Represented (e.g., specific organizations, residents, employees, etc. where this is evident): Oakland Planning & Development Corporation (OPDC) Oakland Business Improvement District (OBID) Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation City Planning Staff
Parcel Number(s): 28-C-10-01; 28-C-10-A-01	
Application Number: BDA-2026-02320	
Meeting Location: Zoom (Virtual)	
Date: April 13, 2026	
Meeting Start Time: 5:30 PM	
Applicant: University of Pittsburgh	Approx. Number of Attendees: 8
Boards and/or Commissions Request(s): Historic Review Commission (HRC)	

How did the meeting inform the community about the development project?

Ex: Community engagement to-date, location and history of the site, demolition needs, building footprint and overall square footage, uses and activities (particularly on the ground floor), transportation needs and parking proposed, building materials, design, and other aesthetic elements of the project, community uses, amenities and programs.

The applicant team began with an overview of the site and historic background of the buildings. Known as the Quad, the area behind the William Pitt Union includes the subject buildings, Bruce and Brackenridge, which front Forbes Ave. These buildings were constructed between 1922 and 1924 as luxury apartments. The University acquired them in the mid-1950s. As part of our required city inspections and our routine care of the buildings, we have identified several conditions that need to be addressed.

The most significant deterioration is occurring at the terracotta cornices at the tops of the buildings. Photos were presented showing water infiltration around embedded steel leads to steel expansion and cracking of the surrounding masonry. This issue is common in buildings of this age. In an abundance of caution, we have installed netting at the corners and upper cornices and placed pedestrian protection below while preparing for the repair work. Historic photos of the buildings were presented.

Our schedule is structured so that this summer we will work on Bruce and Brackenridge. Next summer, we will address Amos and McCormick, and in the summer of 2028, we will complete Holland Hall. The scope includes repairing terracotta cornices where there are minor cracks, replacing sections where damage is more significant, repointing areas of missing or recessed mortar, and repairing limestone at lower levels. The plan includes maintaining the preemptive scaffolding we already installed and adding additional scaffolding as needed so repairs can be performed safely. The netting remains in place until the work begins. For the remaining Quad buildings, we will follow a similar process. Once the work is completed, the buildings will look almost identical to their original appearance but without their current deterioration. Where terracotta can be repaired, we will do so. Where it is beyond repair, we will replace it with GFRC—glass fiber reinforced concrete.

We have both national and local examples of this approach, and the results are nearly indistinguishable from original terracotta. At cornice height, the difference is especially impossible to notice. GFRC replacement is common for

historic restorations in major cities. For example, New York’s landmarked Public Bath and the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., used GFRC for terracotta replacement. A side-by-side comparison from a landmark building in San Francisco shows the original terracotta next to the GFRC replica—the only noticeable difference at installation is that the new material looks cleaner until it weathers. The reason for choosing GFRC is practical: only three fabricators of true terracotta remain in the country. Using real terracotta significantly delays production timelines and would prevent us from completing this work within the project schedule. In Oakland, similar projects—including Thaw Hall, the Pittsburgh Athletic Association, Alumni Hall, and Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hall—successfully used GFRC.

Input and Responses

Topic / Issue	Recap
Visual appearance of material	<p><u>Comment/Concern Raised:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very impressed by how similar the proposed GFRC material matches the original terracotta <p><u>Who raised it:</u> OPDC</p> <p><u>Applicant Response:</u> Acknowledged</p>
Additional elements	<p><u>Comment/Concern Raised:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question whether other elements in addition to the cornices are in need of replacement <p><u>Who raised it:</u> Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation</p> <p><u>Applicant Response:</u> We're keeping all of the historic fabric that we can. We're doing some minor repointing where necessary, and maintaining existing brick, limestone, and terracotta where its salvageable. Where it's beyond repair, and it needs to be replaced, then we're replacing just those limited sections with GFRC.</p>
Timing/Phasing	<p><u>Comment/Concern Raised:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question if any of this exterior work would affect summer housing or anyone occupying these particular areas <p><u>Who raised it:</u> OBID</p> <p><u>Applicant Response:</u> We do have other work going on in housing over the summer, but the intent is that we're going to maintain all activities around the building and in the building as needed. Future work on the remaining buildings will be staggered to only occur during the summer season.</p> <p><u>Note:</u> This DAM and HRC review will also cover future work, on other buildings within the Quad site, so that future reviews may be completed at the DCP staff level.</p>

Recording: [video1808958530.mp4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1808958530)

Planner completing report: Christian Umbach, Senior Planner

