

Minutes to DAG Meeting September 4, 2008

Attendees **49 persons**

Topics **General Discussion**
Presentation – Riverfront Development: Penn Praxis

General Discussion The group complemented David Brownlee on his excellent article and noted Inquirer coverage. In other good news, the ZBA' s action to restrict signage for Unisys was noted with appreciation to the Board for upholding current zoning.

The group inquired about design review at the Planning Commission which will be forthcoming as a new tool for project review. Congratulations were conveyed to Alan Greenberger in his new position as Executive Director of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

George Claflen noted there is a pending design for Dilworth Plaza of great importance to the City. The group agreed to find out more about the status of the project.

Presentation PennPraxis Director Harris Steinberg presented DAG with the results of an evaluation of the Casino designs currently planned for the waterfront. The report was in response to a request from Mayor Nutter to evaluate the impact of Casinos on the physical environment.

The evaluation was limited to traffic, urban design and public access, and did not evaluate other legal issues such as the appropriateness of gambling and parking along the river or the best use of riparian rights.

Four years ago preparation for casinos began under different auspices with initial studies identifying a number of sites

throughout the City. In 2006 as the Central Delaware Riverfront Plan progressed, the State located selected two casino sites within the study area for the Waterfront Plan, igniting neighborhood opposition to the casino sites and also propelling support for the plan.

The evaluation concluded that the impact of parking would be detrimental to the waterfront, not only in the volume of traffic but in the size and shape of the parking structures required to accommodate the casinos. The existing City Code requires 4 cars to 5 slot machines generating a parking facility for 2400 cars in phase one build out of the casinos, while Center City's biggest garage accommodates 1,100 cars. The sheer size of future parking became easier to understand.

The evaluation noted that the successful introduction of transit. The challenge in the short term is to avoid designing roadways for the largest volumes. If large volumes are accommodated as is currently anticipated, the opportunity to create a pedestrian oriented boulevard would be lost.

Another significant finding related to the massing of the casino structures and the degree of public access. Revised site plans suggest that the new buildings be built up to the street, engage the sidewalk, (particularly changing the design for Foxwoods) and promote views through the sites similar to the way a typical grid of public streets would allow views to the water.

It was noted that the City and the State have divided agendas at the moment, but that cooperation between state, city and casinos would be necessary for success of these projects.

For example:

- The State favors only a several-mile separation of the two proposed casinos whereas the City would like greater separation.
- Some feel that the best casino sites have been overlooked, while the State feels that the best sites were selected.
- The City wants to limit the impact of transportation on streets, while the State wants to accommodate increased traffic through highway engineering.
- The State has a focused view of future riverfront use, while the City desires more comprehensive ideas.
- The casinos have a 5,000 slot maximum. Can or should that number be reduced?

While there is much yet to be done, there has been great progress in modifying the proposals for Casinos since Mayor Nutter took office. The attention to design review is one of several accomplishments and the City continues use the permit process to protect the rights of Citizens for a better waterfront in the future.

Submitted by Barbara Ruth