

INVEST NORTH HILLS: Meeting Minutes

Focus Group #1 – Neighborhood Quality of Life

April 16, 2015 (Thursday) 6:30 PM to 9:00 PM

North Hills Manor Community Room, 300 Linden Avenue, North Hills, PA

Planning/Design Team Members in Attendance:

Kyle Speece (Pennrose Properties)

Kyla Bayer, Joel Johnson, and Val Yancey (MCHA)

Garlen Capita, Jaquelin Camp, and Mary Morton (WRT)

Community Participants: 24 Neighbors / Community and Manor Residents were in Attendance

The following is a summary of what was presented and discussed in Focus Group Meeting #1 on Thursday, April 16, 2015. Please refer to “Focus Group #1 Participant Work Product” (separate file) for corresponding information.

I. Welcome.

- a. The facilitator greeted participants and outlined the purpose of the focus groups as well as oriented participants as to survey findings and Advisory Committee efforts to date.
- b. This session will address neighborhood quality of life issues (safety, lighting, noise, etc.) in an effort to include neighbor and resident input on these matters in the redevelopment of North Hills Manor.
- c. The Development Team sent out a survey in December 2014 to the neighbors and residents of the Manor. The Team then met with the Invest North Hills Advisory Committee to discuss survey results and, with the Committee’s input, developed three (3) focus group sessions.
 - o Session 1: Neighborhood Quality of Life (Thursday, April 16th, 6:30 pm - 9:00 pm)
 - o Session 2: Neighborhood Architectural Character & Community Assets / Community History (Saturday, April 18th 9:30 am-12:30 pm)
 - o Session 3: North Hills Manor Unit Design (Interior) and Resident Quality of Life (Thursday, May 28th 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm, open to Manor residents only)
- d. The facilitator presented an overview of the survey results.
 - o The survey asked for the community’s thoughts on a host of issues including: housing quality, community assets, quality of life, interaction with neighbors, and North Hills Manor.
 - o Approximately 400 surveys were distributed. The development team received 97 responses (28% response rate) to the Neighbor Survey and 16 responses (40% response rate) to the Manor Resident Survey. Responses indicated the following:
 - Many long term residents, almost 60% of respondents have lived in the neighborhood over 20 years.
 - There are more families with youth between 11-18 years old living in North Hills Manor, compared with the neighborhood households which had more adults (25-64 years old) and senior (65+) households.

- Over 80% of respondents thought that North Hills has a very strong sense of community; residents want to stay. This is a point of pride. The majority of respondents say they know their neighbors and 77% of Manor respondents and 87% of neighborhood respondents believe that North Hills is a place that they would like to live in the future.
 - The majority of those surveyed (80%+) would be interested in joining a North Hills Neighborhood Association focused on efforts to improve the community.
 - Open space, community connections, location, public transit, good schools and the family nature of the community are all seen as positives.
 - The community center, baseball fields, playground, pool, open space were viewed as community assets.
 - Most felt neighborhood amenities are in fair to good condition. The survey showed limited visitorship at some of the neighborhood facilities, with more frequent visits to the North Hills Community Center, Upper Dublin Community Pool and Evelyn B Wright Park by Manor residents compared to neighborhood residents. Many neighborhood residents reported that they had not visited those facilities at all in the last year or visited less than 3 times in the last year.
 - Although some respondents mentioned safety concerns around traffic and drugs, most respondents reported that they feel very safe in the neighborhood both during the day and at night.
 - You can view the complete survey results and other information on the website. <http://www.investnorthhills.org/2015/03/12/surveys/>
- e. Focus group participants voiced the following in response:
 - It seems like services are being taken away at the North Hills Community Center (the library, etc.). Prices are going up. These are things that the entire community used, why are they being taken away?
 - The North Hills Community Center is not being used as a community center now. If things are being taken away, it means we need to vote for better leadership, we shouldn't throw the children under the bus because it's not being used. If the building is understaffed, you're going to have these issues.
 - The North Hills Community Center is underutilized because of a lack of programming. If there were more things for the youth and family to do they would use it.
 - This process within itself has divided the community. The only thing people want to hear are what the 2 options are. What is happening to the open space?
 - MCHA responded there is no plan and emphasized that we're here to develop the plan with the community.

II. Exercise: Key Issues Facilitated Discussion.

The development team divided participants into two smaller groups for discussion on key quality of life issues that came out of the survey. Both groups were led by development team facilitators. Below are participant comments on the issues discussed.

a. **Break-out Group 1.** Below is a summary of participant comments:

1. **Sidewalks – “Connectivity”**

You have to go to the Township to get sidewalks. It used to be that they would send you a notice and take part of your property to construct sidewalks. Where is the money coming from? Who is responsible for sidewalks?

2. **Traffic Calming – “Slowing People Down”**

4-way stops and speed bumps may be the best option as policing/enforcement is not working. Chelsea Avenue is a real issue/problem street. When streets are too wide, speeding is encouraged. Need to speak to our young people – the speeding tends to be worse among young people.

3. **Parking**

Visitor parking – people who don’t live at the Manor are currently parking in Manor resident parking. Assigned parking or individual driveways could remedy this situation. It makes it clear who owns the space. Handicap space is also an issue.

4. **Safety & Crime**

Loitering issue – none of the people hanging outside the Manor are residents. People don’t loiter on property that is clearly owned. Defensible space – You don’t see people hanging out in front of houses throughout the neighborhood. The playground behind the North Hills Community Center is not safe. (You can’t see the playground from the street.)

5. **Lighting**

Lights are old and spaced too infrequently and they are too dim.

6. **Drug/Gun Activity**

Last year someone was shot, it was a big shock, but an isolated incident. No one believes that drug/gun activity is really an issue. Drugs are not that big of an issue. However, drug activity at the pool is a problem. People outside the neighborhood hop the pool’s fence and use drugs. A taller fence is needed to keep people from jumping the fence and more policing is needed at the pool.

7. **Litter/Dumping**

Dog owners/pick up – feeling is that neighborhood residents walk dogs in the Manor and don’t pick up after them. Township ordinance needs to be enforced. Perhaps you could put up signage with the amount of the fine and a station with dog bags and a trash can.

Source of litter – junk food trash (overall neighborhood issue). Solution – more frequent Township Street Sweeper, trash bins, potentially use the Montgomery County Youth Camp and neighborhood youth participating in clean-up days to remove the litter.

b. **Break-out Group 2.** Below is a summary of participant comments:

1. **Sidewalks - “Connectivity”**

Complete gaps in the existing neighborhood sidewalks.

2. **Traffic Calming – “Slowing People Down”**

Add speed bumps and 4-way stop signs. All streets should have stop signs. Speed bumps could be temporary to allow for snow removal. Pave all of the roads as Beechwood is not paved.

3. **Safety**

Add police satellite offices and/or security cameras. Provide more activities for kids and teens.

4. **Parking**

Provide more resident driveways and signage to define the parking areas. Increase enforcement.

5. **Littering**

Organize community group to clean up. Explore design solution for illegal dumping in MCHA dumpsters. (Relocate, eliminate or place in fenced enclosure).

III. Questions & Answers.

Below is a summary of participant questions that arose during the Q&A portion of the focus group.

Q. – How many people are on the Advisory Committee?

A. – About 24.

Q. – What is their responsibility? More people should know about these meetings.

A. – To contribute to and inform their neighbors of what is going on in the planning process.

Q. – How were they selected and what is the proof that they are doing their job?

A. – MCHA sent letters to neighbors and Manor residents asking for nominations of people to be on the committee (400+ letters were sent out). All of the nominated residents who wanted to participate were accepted as Advisory Committee members. The list of the Advisory Committee members with their contact information is on the website and posted on the community board. The purpose of the Advisory Committee is to advocate and be a voice for people who do not have web access. You can call your Advisory Committee member and ask them questions/request to be on the information list.

IV. Additional.

Below is a summary of additional participant comments.

- Need a place for senior citizens
- If you get rid of the pool, will it be replaced?
- Safety – Environmental air quality when tearing down the buildings is a concern.
- Add activities for kids at the school such as tutoring. One issue is getting kids to participate.
- Community amenities suggestions: indoor basketball, computers, multi-purpose playing fields, weight room

V. Wrap – Up.

Thank you for coming. We appreciate your input!

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