

# INVEST NORTH HILLS: Meeting Minutes

## Focus Group #3 – North Hills Manor Interior Unit Design and Resident Quality of Life

May 28, 2015 (Thursday) 6:30 PM to 9:00 PM

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

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### Planning/Design Team Members in Attendance:

Kyle Speece (Pennrose Properties)

Kyla Bayer and Val Yancey (MCHA)

Garlen Capita and Jaquelin Camp (WRT)

### North Hills Manor Participants: 22 Manor Residents were in Attendance

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The following is a summary of what was presented and discussed in Focus Group Meeting #3 on Thursday, May 28, 2015. Please refer to “Focus Group #3: Participant Work Product” (separate file) for corresponding information.

#### I. Welcome & Introductions.

- a. The facilitator greeted participants. The Design Team and participants introduced themselves.
- b. The facilitator explained that through a competitive process, the Montgomery County Housing Authority (MCHA), selected Pennrose Properties, LLC, a national real estate development and residential property management company, to redevelop North Hills Manor. WRT is serving as the architect and planner for the development process.

#### II. Overview of Planning Process.

- a. The facilitator outlined the purpose of the focus groups process and reported briefly on the two prior focus groups: Session 1: Neighborhood Quality of Life (April 16, 2015) and Session 2: Neighborhood Architectural Character & Community Assets / Community History (April 18, 2015.) The facilitator indicated that both sessions were well attended and residents and neighborhood stakeholders had an opportunity to provide input into the redevelopment of the Manor and neighborhood amenities. The meeting minutes and presentation materials will be posted on [www.investnorthhills.org](http://www.investnorthhills.org). Those, who may not have internet access, can request hard copies of the materials from Val Yancey, North Hills Manor Development Manager.
- b. This focus group session will discuss the interior design and layout of the new North Hills Manor units and specific site issues and services that would impact quality of life for North Hills Manor residents. The facilitator explained that the Manor was built in 1954 and the systems are outdated; she emphasized that the MCHA is committed to redeveloping the Manor and replacing the units.

- c. The facilitator oriented participants as to survey findings and Advisory Committee efforts to date. 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.
  - Session 1: Neighborhood Quality of Life (Thursday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 6:30 pm – 9:00pm)
  - Session 2: Neighborhood Architectural Character & Community Assets / Community History (Saturday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 9:30 am - 12:30 pm)
  - Session 3: North Hills Manor Unit Design (Interior) and Resident Quality of Life (Thursday, May 28<sup>th</sup> 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm open to Manor residents only)
  
- d. The facilitator presented an overview of the survey results.
  - 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.
  - 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 field, 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/>

### III. Group Exercise I: Housing Types – Twins vs. Townhomes

The facilitator described the difference between Twins and Townhomes utilizing a board with two conceptual plans and images of townhomes and twin housing examples as a point of discussion. (See “Focus Group #3: Participant Work Product” (separate file) for reference.) The group had an opportunity to discuss and ask questions about the different housing types. This was followed by a vote on resident preference. The following summarizes the participant’s reactions and development team’s response.

#### Twins vs. Townhomes.

- The group was in consensus in its preference for twins. There was no support for townhomes. Penrose added, that a benefit of twins is that with 2 front doors per building (plus side doors on the stacked flat units) people feel that it is a neighborhood which helps you keep the neighborhood character when the surrounding housing is more suburban in character
- A resident asked whether the open spaces in a twin layout would be similar to what exists as there is concern that people will congregate in spaces that do not clearly belong to anyone. The team responded that the concept of “defensible space” is critical in site design, especially in defining what public and private space is. Defensible space is the idea that people feel ownership and responsibility for an area that is clearly theirs.

Q: How much of the space shown in the Twin example will be back yards? Will there be back yards?

A: It may vary depending on the final layout.

Q: Do you have more room in a townhome versus a twin?

A: The unit sizes will be very similar between a townhome and a twin, but twins will take more land to develop the same number of units.

Q: Will all the units fit back on the existing sites?

A: All 50 units will be replaced. Exact unit type and possible additional amenities may be limited depending on the extent of the impacted site. MCHA staff explained that MCHA is committed to one-to-one replacement approach (Goal replace all 50 units). There will be no net loss of units.

Q: Do neighbors complain about the shared driveways in the Twins example?

A: The shared driveways exist at Crest Manor now and residents respect their driveways. From experience, Penrose has seen more resident issues with parking lots (with or without assigned spaces) than they have seen with the shared driveways.

Q: What is more costly to build, townhomes or twins?

A: They are pretty close in cost; twins require more exterior materials which raises the cost but there is not a huge cost difference between the two building types.

Q: I am concerned that there will not be enough parking. What is to prevent someone from parking in front of your house in the Twin example?

A: Right now there is only limited off-street parking, which is not specific to the units. Both examples would provide more off-street parking than is currently available. Twin units would have driveways specific to the units. Townhomes would have shared lots behind the units. Street parking is all public; anyone can park there but they cannot block your driveway. In the Twin example there are two parking spaces provided for each unit which Penrose believes is a generous standard.

Q: What is the bedroom mix? How many one bedroom units will you be providing?

A: The unit mix has not been figured out yet.

Q: How will that be determined?

A: It will be based on a number of factors including- what the site can accommodate and the needs of the returning resident population.

#### IV. Group Exercise II: Unit Configuration

During this exercise, participants were engaged in learning about various types of unit layouts, building configurations, standards for materials, finishes, amenities and accessibility features. The facilitators provided feedback from the North Hills Manor resident survey findings regarding the existing challenges with the current unit layout and presented visual examples of how in the new units those challenges may be overcome.

- a. **Manor Survey Responses.** The facilitator explained that the resident survey responses identified a number of challenges that residents had with existing layouts of their units. Relevant findings are:
- The least liked elements of the existing Manor homes are the following: laundry facilities, windows, kitchen size, parking, closet size, and bedroom size.
  - 75% of respondents said they do not think that the Manor is well maintained.
  - In describing the physical condition of their homes, 42% of respondents felt their unit is in good to very good condition, 21% felt it is in fair condition and 37% felt it is in poor to very poor condition.

The facilitator further explained that the demolition and redevelopment of the Manor, provides an opportunity to address some of these issues.

- b. **Unit Layout and Building Configuration.** Referring to Board B, the facilitator oriented participants to the types of configurations that could be considered. She explained the following:
- Stacked layout - there could be four 1 bedroom units with two units on the ground floor and two units above.
  - Two bedroom layout - the living areas and powder rooms could be on the ground floor and the bedrooms would be on the second floor.
  - Three bedroom layout - the living areas and powder rooms could be on the ground floor and the bedrooms could be on the second floor.
  - Accessible units will be provided in a variety of unit sizes.

The following summarizes the participant's reactions and development team's response.

Q: How many people responded to the manor survey?

A: 16 of the 50 units so that is about 32%. This is also why we are having these focus groups in addition to what we heard in the surveys. We want to give all the residents additional opportunities to provide input and also go into more depth about some of the issues that came out of the survey.

Q: Will there be four bedrooms?

A: Yes there will be four bedroom units. We didn't depict four bedrooms on this board because of space but the 4 bedroom units would be very similar to the 3 bedroom units with an additional fourth bedroom above the living areas or on the first floor.

Q: Could you do 2 bedroom units above 1 bedroom units?

A: We could do that, but we often find that there are seniors occupying the one bedroom units and they don't like to have families living above them.

Q: What are exit requirements? Are you required to have two doors to each unit?

A: No, building codes require two means of emergency egress from living areas; however one of those means can be a window. You are not required to have two doors out of an apartment but are required to have windows of a certain size.

Q: Will there be laundry?

A: Yes in each unit.

**c. Accessible Units for those with Mobility Impairments.**

- The facilitator explained what "accessibility" means. By law, and under the requirements of our funding source, an accessible unit needs to accommodate someone in a wheelchair getting to all rooms in the unit. This project will be subject to the requirements of a variety of accessibility regulations including, but not limited to the American Disabilities Act, Chapter 11 of the Uniform Construction Code, Fair Housing Accessibility and Visitability Guidelines, UFAS Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards.
- To be fully accessible, the entire unit needs to be on one floor. So for example you could not have an accessible unit with one of the bedrooms upstairs. At least 10% of units are required to be fully accessible, spread across unit sizes.
- In addition to having fully accessible units, the property will also have units that are "visitible" which means are designed to accommodate visitors to the ground floor who have trouble with steps or who use wheelchairs or walkers. The concept is that, if you are in a wheelchair, you can get from the sidewalk or the driveway to the house and use the first floor in an unobstructed way. These units will have at least one accessible entry and a useable powder room or bathroom on the ground floor.

- d. **Presentation of Unit Features, Materials and Finishes Examples.** Referring to Boards C and D the facilitator showed participants the types of materials that have been used by Pennrose on some previous projects which meet its quality standards for construction and ongoing maintenance.

**The development team emphasized that there are many factors which could affect the selection of materials, finishes and unit design, including budget, and that future Manor units may not look like those on this board nor have the exact features or finishes. These images are intended to provide residents with examples of similar properties.**

The facilitator explained, that overall the goal is to have durable, low-maintenance materials and a neutral look that can serve as backdrop for residents' various decorating tastes. The following summarizes the participant's reactions and development team's response.

Q: Can we have options on the types of materials and finishes?

A: There are no options. We are asking for your input on preferences for the finishes, but once they are selected for the project they will be the same in all units. Pennrose explained that the range of available products is constantly changing, and there is no guarantee that the units will have exactly the materials shown on the boards, but the materials will be based on these quality standards.

Comment: This is really nice.

Q: Will there be individual mailboxes?

A: The USPS does not support individual delivery to every unit in multi-unit developments, so there will be shared kiosks for mail as shown on the board. We try to make these look as nice as possible and locate them in convenient, accessible areas of the site.

Q: Will upstairs units get a porch?

A: We understand that residents like front porches, as does the development team. We think it gives the development character and is a nice feature that contributes to the overall neighborhood aesthetics. We will try to incorporate front porches to the degree possible but there is no guarantee that all units will include front porches.

Comment: These are beautiful.

Q: Will all kitchens be the same size?

A: All kitchens will include the same level of amenities, but the layouts and sizes will vary with unit sizes and types.

Q: What will the unit mix be?

A: The unit mix has not yet been determined, but there will be 50 units.

Q: What are the floors?

A: Likely vinyl tile or vinyl plank may be used in living areas; carpet is often used in the bedrooms. Vinyl plank looks like hardwood floors, you can scrub it and does not scratch easily and provides a neutral clean look. Residents are typically very happy with it.

## V. Group Exercise III: Resident Quality of Life

The facilitator described the Manor survey findings as they relate to resident quality of life. After describing the survey findings the planning team led residents through a prioritization exercise.

- a. **Manor Survey Responses.** The facilitator explained that the resident survey responses identified a list of programming preferences for both children and seniors. When asked, which of the following services would you find useful and suggest be provided in the revitalized North Hills community? Survey residents responded:

- Children / Youth Programing: Homework Club 23%, Other afterschool activities 23%, Art & Music 14%, Community Service 14%, Exercise/Fitness 14%, Computer Club 10% (2% non-response).
  - Senior Programming: Housekeeping Assistance 18%, Meals on Wheels 15%, Benefits Update 15%, Medical Navigation Program/Preventative Health Care 15%, Job Skills Training 13%, Social Events 13%, Community Service 7% (4% other or non-response).
- b. **Program Prioritization.** Referring to Boards E, F, G and H, the facilitator asked for feedback on identifying and prioritizing services/ programs that may be included in a redeveloped North Hills Manor. The Boards reflect a list of programs that resulted from survey results, input from public and Advisory Committee meetings as wells as Pennrose’s experience. Participants were asked: What is missing? They were instructed to indicate their top two priorities in each category listed by placing a green dot next to the listed program. Please refer to “Focus Group #3: Participant Work Product” (separate file) for corresponding information.

The results of the prioritization exercise are as follows:

- Children/ Youth Programming. The top three priorities are:
  - Afterschool Program Activities
  - College and Career Readiness
  - Community Service and Cultural Outings
- Family Programming. The top three priorities are:
  - Education/ Career Advancement and Family Support
  - Health
  - Community Service
- Senior Programming. The top three priorities are:
  - Health
  - Community Service/Social Events
  - Intergenerational Programs
- Special Needs Programming. The top priority is:
  - Community Service/Enrollment in Benefit Programs

The following summarizes the participants’ reactions and development team’s response.

Comment. Participants listed some preferred activities including: Childcare; Jobs for Teens; Small grant programs for community projects; Information to parents on programs and discount passes that they can use for zoo, museum trips and other outings for families who can’t afford to pay the full fee.

Q: Where would these activities take place? Will there be a new community center?

A: These activities could take place at a new Manor community room as well as North Hills Park and Community Center.

Q: Are these actives only for Manor Residents or for the entire community?

A. This exercise is to determine activities and programming specifically for North Hills Manor residents.

Comment: Need for more job skills training (automotive and other technical skills...)

Q. Is ‘housekeeping assistance’ instructional or actual cleaning services?

A: This is more instructional.

Comment: Many seniors have health challenges and need actual cleaning services.

## VI. Question and Answers.

Below is a summary of additional participant questions that arose during the focus group session.

Q: What year will this development start?

A: Pennrose estimates that Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) applications will be due in early 2016. If we are successfully funded in the first round we would hope to start construction in 2017.

Q: Didn't they already say that they have the funding for this project? It was stated at an earlier meeting that there was \$17 million dollars already funded for this project.

A: A plan is in place to fund the project, but there is a competitive process we must complete to be awarded the funds. We need to go through an application process through the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) who administers the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program for the state.

Q. What if the application is not funded?

A. While, there is no guarantee that an application will be funded, Pennrose and the development team has had considerable success with developments funded this way over many years. At Crest Manor, MCHA and Pennrose just received a competitive award to redevelop that site. The MCHA and its partners are committed to accomplishing a redeveloped North Hills.

Q: When is the next meeting?

A: To be determined.

## VII. Wrap Up.

Thank you for coming. We appreciate your input!

-END-