
February 12, 2014

Update on St. Charles Seminary Development:

A. On the status of new development:

We met with Bishop Senior in mid-January, and he reported that 14 developers had submitted proposals for the 40+ acres the Seminary hopes to sell or lease. The Seminary and its real estate committee are now reviewing the proposals. Their next step is to select a subset of developers for follow-up revised proposals. We have heard that selection of a final proposal is imminent.

Bishop Senior would not divulge much about the 14 proposals. We know from other sources that the Seminary's Request for Proposals placed no limits or guidance on developers' plans. However, Bishop Senior said no developer had proposed a big box store (such as a Target, Wal-Mart, or Home Depot). He said that they were "mostly residential" and that many developers were considering options to keep the College building. Bishop Senior reported that developers seemed to be exhibiting "a sensitivity to finding a workable plan for everyone."

However, Bishop Senior made it clear that it is premature for him to commit to any particular use or outcome for the property. He did not rule out choosing a developer seeking a nonresidential use, such as office or retail, or one that would require a change in zoning. He also did not clarify what he meant by proposals being "mostly residential."

That could mean that most of the proposals were residential, or that each proposal combined residential with some other use. We also don't know what density the 14 developers proposed.

We have met with two developers so far, at their requests, and so we know what they have proposed. Both of these developers believe they are on the Seminary's "short list." One developer would preserve the College building and add two new buildings in a mixed use project consisting of residential and commercial components. The second developer is proposing to convert the existing College building into apartments and to construct hundreds of additional townhomes or apartments elsewhere on the site. We believe that both proposals, as described to us, would require changes in zoning. The particulars of these proposals are still in flux, and we are pleased that the developers have reached out to us at this stage for guidance on how the community would react to aspects of their plans.

Nonetheless, it should be apparent that the development of St. Charles Seminary has the potential to be large and impactful on the community. For reference, the entire Indian Creek Estates has 113 houses. And the whole area bounded by Hazelhurst Avenue, City Avenue, East Wynnewood Road, and the railroad tracks has just 140 houses. Even without any changes in zoning, we estimate that a residential developer would have the right to build about 120 to 160 houses or apartment units.

Bishop Senior told us that if a change in zoning is sought, it will be by the developer. From our perspective, that means that once the Seminary selects a developer, the community will be negotiating with

the developer, not the Seminary. **That will be a critical juncture.** If the developer shares our vision from the get-go, we will have an easier time achieving our goals. If the developer is not aligned with the community's priorities initially, negotiations are likely to be more protracted and costly.

B. On renovating buildings the Seminary will keep:

Renovation of the Seminary buildings that back onto homes in Indian Creek Estates has moved to the front burner. The Seminary plans to relocate its entire operation to that portion of their site, plus allow for possible growth. The buildings need a lot of work. Between renovations and reconfiguring structures to meet their needs, Bishop Senior anticipates needing a \$30 to \$40 million investment.

The Seminary will shepherd its own renovation process through the Township. That process is likely to begin before the City Avenue parcel has been sold. The first stage of the Seminary's renovation process would be to subdivide the entire Seminary property into two parcels – one for sale/lease, one to keep. Bishop Senior said he expects that to take place by April. It will be important for us to keep tabs on the subdivision process as it can have implications for how development will play out on the rest of the land.

Bishop Senior told us that he hopes that the consolidation will not require expanding any of the existing Seminary buildings. However, that may depend on the architect's plans.

From the neighbors' perspective, the question will be how to harmonize the Seminary's and neighbors' needs while still being

supportive of the Seminary's goals. Our judgment is that the neighborhood is better off with a thriving Seminary than without one, as long as the Seminary's use remains in harmony with the community's current character.

Bishop Senior also told us that the Seminary is having its art appraised. He said there would not be room for all of it once the large College building is sold. Some art will be sold to help fund renovations of the buildings they are keeping.

C. The Seminary has retained a lobbyist

We have learned from two independent sources that the Seminary has retained Ken Davis to lobby the Township on its behalf. Davis is a former Lower Merion Township Commissioner who now has a local real estate practice.

D. We have retained our own counsel

CNCQ has retained Ken Aaron as counsel to provide legal advice – including but not limited to zoning matters – and to help advocate on our behalf to Township Commissioners and staff. Aaron has extensive experience with the Lower Merion zoning and land development process – he was on the zoning hearing board for 18 years and before that was on the Township Planning Commission. He also has worked with neighborhood organizations, representing Shortridge, Wynnewood, and Gladwyne in land development matters. He knows the Commissioners and Township staff. We thought he would advocate well on our behalf and would be a source of sage advice regarding zoning and land development matters. In addition, zoning is

complicated and specialized, knowledgeable legal advice is critical to avoid oversights and unintended consequences.

E. We disseminated our survey

As of this writing, more than 180 residents throughout Merion, Wynnewood, and Bala Cynwyd have completed the community survey. The goal of the survey was to get a clear understanding of the community's priorities and how strongly and universally various views are held.

If you have not yet taken the survey, please do so. Everyone's view is important and there is strength in numbers when more people participate. You can take the survey at www.surveymonkey.com/s/stopmakingdense website. If you have already completed the survey, thank you for your participation!

We will share with you the survey results in a later email or meeting.

F. Meetings, meetings, and more meetings.

Representatives of CNCQ are trying to spread the word about the organization and our mission.

1. With Civic Groups: In January, we presented to the Overbrook Farms Civic Association and the Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd. We are in communication with the leadership of the Merion Civic and Shortridge Civic Associations, with a goal of coordination and maximizing our collective impact.

2. With the Township: We have scheduled meetings with Township staff and some Commissioners to introduce ourselves and to articulate our concerns and the reasons for them. This is part of the process of advocating for the community to the decision-makers in the township.

3. With Developers: As discussed earlier, leaders of CNCQ have met with two potential developers, at the developers' request. There are two main reasons such meetings may prove fruitful: First, they give us a sense of the range of possible developments in advance of the Seminary selecting a developer. Second, they provide an opportunity to convey the community's main areas of concern. The hope is that, if forewarned, developers will reframe their proposals in the early stages. Good developers make an effort to accommodate the community while still achieving their return targets.

4. Open space: Based on member suggestions and support, we are actively investigating how to raise funds to purchase open space rights from the Seminary. CNCQ leaders have been reaching out to conservation groups and government officials.

H. Fund Raising

We have begun the critical task of raising the money we need to effectively seek the most acceptable outcome for our community. We are grateful to those neighbors who already have given generously. **We ask again that each of you contribute.** Our immediate goal is to raise the funds to keep paying our legal advisor's bills and to pay for experts, particularly a traffic engineer, we will soon need to retain. The seven directors of CNCQ are all unpaid volunteers who have donated

considerable personal time and money to this endeavor. Many neighbors have also contributed time and money. We need to raise more.

To contribute, please go to: www.stopmakingdense.org/donate.

Or send a check to:

CNCQ

PO Box 184

Merion Station, PA 19066