

Attn: City of Pittsburgh Planning Commission
City of Pittsburgh, Department of City Planning
200 Ross St., Fourth Floor
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

January 11, 2022

Re: DCP-ZDR-2021-07477, 250 44th Street, Holy Family Redevelopment

Dear Esteemed Members of the City Planning Commission:

We write today on behalf of Lawrenceville Corporation (LC) and Lawrenceville United (LU) in regards to the Holy Family Redevelopment Project in Central Lawrenceville. Lawrenceville Corporation (LC) serves as the catalyst and conduit for responsible and sustainable growth in the Lawrenceville community. Lawrenceville United's (LU) mission is to improve and protect the quality of life for all Lawrenceville residents. Together, we have created a community process that provides a forum where proposed development projects can be discussed, vetted, and measured against community plans and priorities. This process enables us to identify priority issues that help guide conversations with developers through the planning and construction processes.

LC and LU have worked with E Properties & Development for nearly a decade through a robust community process for their proposed redevelopment of the former Holy Family Church and School. This community process has included large in-person community meetings, smaller focus-group sessions, and community-wide Zoom meetings. We've engaged hundreds of residents and stakeholders from various impact areas and gone through multiple iterations of planning phases, revisions, and negotiations with E Properties & Development.

A brief summary of this history with E Properties on this site follows:

- 2012: initial community meetings were hosted by LU/LC in May 2012 regarding a 80-unit proposed development on the site. Neighbors expressed concerns about aspects of the plan, including its density, and LU/LC worked with E Properties & Development and community members to adapt the plans and build community consensus, resulting in LU/LC and 40+ residents supporting a revised development plan for the site at the Zoning Board of Adjustments.
- 2013-2016: a resident, acting independent of LU/LC, filed an appeal to the ZBA's approval, finally resulting in a settlement agreement in 2016.
- 2016-2018: the property was listed for sale. When plans from a potential buyer for complete demolition of the entire site were shared with LU/LC, we shared our position that the church was a priority for preservation.
- Spring-Fall 2018: a demolition permit for the site (including the church) was filed by E Properties & Development. In response, LU and LC jointly filed a local historic nomination on the church building to prevent its demolition in coordination with

Preservation Pittsburgh and the Lawrenceville Historic Society. After negotiations, E Properties & Development, LU, and LC formally agreed with each other to withdraw both the demolition permit and local historic nomination on the church, and to work collaboratively in good faith around a new redevelopment plan and community engagement process for the site that would bring it back into productive use, while adaptively reusing & preserving the church. As part of this written agreement, E Properties & Development committed to supporting a local historic nomination on the church building within a month of completion of redevelopment, to provide lasting protections on the building while freeing E Properties from the restrictions of a local historic designation preceding and during the construction phase of its adaptive reuse.

- November 2018- April 2019: two well-attended open and public community meetings were hosted by LU/LC around a new redevelopment plan. In response to community feedback, LU and LC jointly supported the redevelopment plan at the Zoning Board of Adjustments with the condition that the community would have an opportunity to review and comment on exterior design plans for the church building once they were fleshed out by the development team. The ZBA reflected this condition in their approval, requiring review from the Planning Commission.
- September 2021: another well-attended public community meeting was held by LU and LC with the development team regarding the exterior design plans for the church building, in preparation of the Planning Commission's review.

Throughout all this, the consensus in the community has been clear that redevelopment of the Holy Family site is widely supported and needed, and preservation of the historic church is important. More broadly, as the Planning Commission is well aware, LU and LC have in recent years highly prioritized affordable housing as essential to Lawrenceville's redevelopment, reflected by our spearheading of the first Community Land Trust and Inclusionary Housing Overlay District, among many other efforts.

Consequently, we are pleased to see development plans move forward that bring this vacant, blighted property back into productive use; preserve and adaptively modify the historic church structure; and create 5 new units of affordable housing per the standards of the Inclusionary Housing Overlay District.

These current plans presented by E Properties to the Planning Commission have been broadly supported in well-attended community meetings. In regards to the exterior of the church, we heard clear consensus from the community meeting in September 2021 that the community wishes to see the iconic frieze preserved on the front of the church (picturing the Holy Family). We appreciate that E Properties was willing to preserve this, and understand that the replacement of that feature was an enforceable requirement per the sale of the property from the Diocese. We regret that our efforts to persuade the Diocese to reconsider this requirement have been unsuccessful, but appreciate that E Properties was willing to preserve this in deference to the community's desires. We appreciate the development team's efforts to make the residential townhomes contextual to the adjacent neighborhood, and their addressing of issues that came up in the community process related to parking, traffic, and dumpster

locations. Finally, we appreciate E Properties' commitment to see this project through, despite significant hurdles.

However, our organizations have lingering and significant concerns that we feel important to raise before the Planning Commission:

- **Conformity with Inclusionary Housing Overlay District:** We appreciate that as one of the first development projects subject to the Inclusionary Zoning legislation there are lessons learned and operational issues to work through. We also realize that as one of the first projects to be subject to inclusionary zoning's standards, it's important that a strong precedent is set for future developments that fall under these standards. As per Section 907.04.A.6 of the code, inclusionary units must be integrated within, and distributed throughout each building and shall be equivalent to market-rate units within the buildings in all ways. As presented to the Planning Commission in December 2021, the developer plans to designate one townhouse affordable out of 24 in the first two phases of development and four condo units affordable out of 24 in the third and final phase of development within the Church. This plainly does not meet the requirement that inclusionary units be spread across the development project and equivalent to market-rate units. We have made it clear that we're committed to working with E Properties to support successful implementation of the inclusionary units, but the City must enforce phasing and typology of the inclusionary units that is equivalent with the phasing and typology of the market-rate units. Enforcing the inclusionary zoning ordinance as written especially prudent as this is a precedent-setting project, and we have repeatedly heard from other municipalities with longer track records of inclusionary zoning that deferring affordable units to future phases (that never got constructed) was one way that developers had historically avoided the inclusionary zoning requirements. *We request that the Planning Commission make it a conditional approval that the developer provide inclusionary units equivalent to the phases and typology of the project as a whole.*
- **Historic Designation of the Church:** As mentioned before, E Properties & Development entered into a Memo of Understanding (MOU) in September 2018 with Lawrenceville Corporation and Lawrenceville United. The MOU included, among other items, a commitment from the development team to "ensure that an Individual Property Historic Nomination Form for former Holy Family Church (limited to the sanctuary) is prepared and submitted to the City of Pittsburgh's Historic Review Commission for review and approval within a month of completion of the project." This commitment was critical to LU and LC withdrawing their local historic nomination on the church. However, E Properties has recently stated that they will no longer support a local historic nomination on the church after its completion because it could hinder its ability to finance the project now that the units are condominiums and not rental units. The development team was aware of this condition and commitment while they developed plans and proformas, and the preservation, restoration, and historic designation of the church has always been a priority for the community. The community in good faith trusted that the development team would hold true to the agreement. The Holy Family Church is a contributing property to Lawrenceville's national historic district. Lasting

protections of this iconic and meaningful marker of Lawrenceville's built environment and cultural legacy continues to be a community priority, whether or not a local historic designation is the appropriate mechanism. *We request that the Planning Commission make it a conditional approval that the developer commit to ensuring the historic preservation of the church exterior at completion of the project.*

- **Tree Planting:** Tree replacement and landscaping should reflect the same care and attention to quality and detail as the rest of the development, which we believe is underserved by the current planting plan despite some willingness from E Properties to work with us on this. As presented, the tree plan barely complies with the minimum requirements for new and replacement tree plantings, and in fact falls short in several significant regards, including the inclusion of a species on the city's prohibited species list (Elm). Given the low tree canopy cover in Central Lawrenceville and community goals iterated in the ReLeaf Lawrenceville Plan, more attention must be given to the planting plan to ensure city requirements are met and enforced and, where possible, exceeded. *We ask that the Planning Commission consider a landscape design and tree plan that addresses these issues as a condition of any approval.*

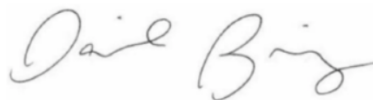
After such a long period of time working in good faith with E Properties & Development on this site and so much progress made, we regret that our organizations cannot offer full-throated support today to the Planning Commission because of these issues. We broadly support the redevelopment plan presented by E Properties and Indovina Architects and we don't want to see more delays that leave this site left vacant and further dilapidated, but we believe this project should deliver on its commitment to the historic preservation of the church exterior, and that it should comport with the City's Inclusionary Housing Overlay District and tree standards.

We thank the Planning Commission for considering this testimony.

Sincerely,



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