



POINT BREEZE AVENUE CORRIDOR REVITALIZATION PLAN

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS/MEETINGS

FOCUS GROUP: HOUSING

MEETING DATE: May 5, 2023

FACILITATORS: Ryan Mawhinney, Dave Schwartz

INVITES/ATTENDEES

PRESENT	ORGANIZATION	NAME	EMAIL / CONTACT	NOTES
x	Greater Philadelphia Community Alliance (GPCA)	Anwar Mathis, Anthony Lugo	AnwarMathis@gpca-phila.org	Diversified Community Services / Dixon House
x	Department of Planning and Development - Division of Housing and Community Development	Mark Dodds	mark.dodds@phila.gov	
x	Housing Development Corporation (PHDC)	Ryan Ambrose Director	Ryan.Ambrose@phdc.phila.gov	Phila Redevelopment Authority (PRA)
x	Housing Development Corporation (PHDC)	Angel Rodriguez, Executive Dir, Land Mgt	Angel.Rodriguez@phdc.phila.gov	Land Bank
x	Philadelphia Housing Authority	Thomas Magras VP Property Mgt	Thomas.Magras@pha.phila.gov	
x	Department of Planning and Development - Planning Commission	Sarah Banh, City Planner, South District	Sarah.Banh@phila.gov	
x	Department of Commerce	Vinh Ho, Business Services Manager	vinh.ho@phila.gov	

MEETING SUMMARY

Project Overview and Introductions

Bergmann started the meeting by explaining the project's study area and objective, which is to develop a vision, goals, and strategies to enhance the commercial corridor to benefit and serve the broader Point Breeze neighborhood. A primary focus is on economic development and physical improvements along the corridor rather than conducting a comprehensive housing study for the entire neighborhood. The team recognizes that housing and economic development are closely connected and is discussing housing needs with the community, which is one purpose for holding this stakeholder meeting.

Bergmann also provided an overview of the project and outreach process, which includes monthly Steering Committee meetings, a Community Survey, Public Workshops, and the Stakeholder Focus Group meetings. Bergmann summarized the themes being heard in the process and that the overall vision is to create an inclusive, diverse, attractive, clean, safe, and active Avenue. Newer residents are drawn to Point Breeze due to its housing affordability and accessibility to other parts of the City. While the community generally supports new development and redevelopment, long-term residents are concerned about affordability and maintaining and highlighting cultural diversity in the neighborhood. There is also a strong emphasis on improving property maintenance and cleaning vacant lots and buildings.

Opportunities – Housing Programs

Bergmann asked what housing programs and services the organizations provide that we should consider as we prepare our plan to address key issues heard by the community. The group held a detailed discussion about affordable housing efforts in the Point Breeze neighborhood. The discussion revolved around different strategies and initiatives to enhance existing housing programs and encourage the development of affordable housing to increase homeownership and ultimately help address concerns of displacement.

Ryan Ambrose discussed the housing programs provided by the PHDC. The **Neighborhood Preservation Initiative (NPI)** is a \$400 million bond program approved by the City Council in 2021 that supports the development and preservation of affordable housing. It uses bridge funding for existing low-income housing tax credit projects and funding to help reduce the purchase cost of properties. It also helps fund the right-to-counsel component of the City's eviction diversion program, providing legal support to tenants facing eviction. It also funds attorney time to untangle tangled titles, helping residents resolve issues with property ownership and helping to preserve generational homeownership. The **Basic Systems Repair Program (BSRP)** offers basic repairs, such as fixing roofs, installing ramps, and modifying bathrooms for lower-income homeowners, helping them stay in their homes. The **Adaptive Modification Program (AMP)** focuses on modifying homes to accommodate the needs of residents, such as installing ramps or modifying bathrooms for accessibility. The **Turn the Key** program targets city employees who are first-time homebuyers. There is an infill development with 26 affordable single-family units proposed in the neighborhood and eligible for the Turn the Key program. <https://whyy.org/articles/philadelphia-officials-celebrate-neighborhood-preservation-initiative-first-year/>

More information on these programs and others City housing programs and activities, the City's housing goals, and the number people/families served by these programs is located at the City's Division of Housing and Community Development Housing Action Plan dashboard. <https://www.phila.gov/departments/division-of-housing-and-community-development/about/housing-action-plan/housing-action-plan-dashboard/>. Information on how many projects take advantage of these programs in Point Breeze can be accessed at this dashboard. The census tracts in the Point Breeze Avenue area are 36, 37.01, 32, 31, 20, 21.

Thomas Magras described that PHA provides and manages public housing properties, including Cassie Holland Court, a seniors-only (55+) development with 72 units on Point Breeze Avenue. Residents must be under 80% of the area's median income before their admission. PHA is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the common areas and the overall presentation of the property. PHA also has 112 scattered site properties for families along Point Breeze. PHA is responsible for providing all maintenance services to these properties.

Angel Rodriguez described the Philadelphia Land Bank program, which issues requests for proposals for developers interested in developing city-owned land. It is a niche market, as the applicants are typically small to mid-sized developers with expertise in managing the process for scattered site development and affordable housing. The focus is on targeting first-time homebuyers and City employees at or below 80% of the area median income. They own about nine scattered site properties along the Avenue's commercial corridor, some of which are not developable. There is an issue with maintaining it as green space. A community group has expressed interest in a community garden at 1822 Point Breeze Avenue at the south end of the corridor, but there is a capacity issue.

The Department of Revenue offers property tax relief programs for long-time homeowners in Point Breeze, but some individuals may still fall through the cracks.

There are various housing programs and services available in Point Breeze, and the challenge is effectively reaching out to the community and helping applicants navigate the available options and resources.



Bergmann asked the group to describe what they see as the biggest priorities for housing along and near the Avenue barriers that currently exist that hinder addressing priorities. The group focused on the challenges of administering specific programs and encouraging and educating people to take advantage of them. It was mentioned that businesses might not be aware of available programs and that navigating through them can be difficult. Vinh emphasized the need for more comprehensive outreach beyond newsletters to identify and assist those who require help with program applications. Thomas mentioned challenges in engaging residents for job training programs, with engagement becoming more difficult in recent years. He suggested a more personal approach, like going door-to-door, to disseminate information about rental assistance and job fairs effectively. The group speculated that pandemic fatigue and overwhelming materials might contribute to the disconnect in resident engagement. Mark added that outreach is crucial, but limited resources and high demand citywide can lead to oversubscribed programs. Being mindful of what is promised during outreach is essential.

Another priority is to address vacant properties with tangled title situations, as vacant buildings can sit idle for a long time. It was questioned what the City's capacity and strategy is to address these situations. It was suggested to explore solutions such as changing titles or finding developers to renovate these vacant houses to be utilized to meet the housing needs in the area.

The group highlighted the importance of targeted outreach and personalized approaches to overcome barriers and ensure effective program participation.

Potential Strategies

Bergmann then asked the group to discuss potential strategies to address the barriers. Bergmann reiterated issues raised during the outreach process that residents are moving into the neighborhood due to its affordability, and the influx is driving up housing values and property taxes, leading to the displacement of longer-term residents who may no longer afford to live there. A participant asked what the number of people is benefiting from Homestead Exemption benefits and how many have incorrect housing appraisals, emphasizing the importance of understanding program utilization and administrative gaps. It was pointed out that taxes and the cost burden of owning a home in the area may be the real issue.

Angel mentioned the city council's resolution to increase homestead amounts and emphasized the need for maintaining long-term residence. Vinh Ho inquired about the eligibility of Point Breeze property owners for the Whole Home Repairs Fund and suggested developing strategies to encourage participation, given the high residential vacancy rates. He further noted that landlords are qualified for forgivable loans for occupied rental properties. Ryan Ambrose highlighted a pilot program to assist small landlords with rental property improvements, and the discussion concluded with an emphasis on creative solutions to address community concerns. Vinh urged the participants to think creatively and express their opinions on solutions to address the community's housing needs.

Bergmann closed the meeting by stating the next steps, which are to prepare a meeting summary, develop strategies based on the information obtained in the entire outreach process, and encourage the participants to attend the next public workshop for the project on the draft strategies.

Note: This confirms and records our interpretation of the discussions that occurred, as well as any understandings reached during this meeting. It captures the main points and may not include every detail or contribution.

