



POINT BREEZE AVENUE CORRIDOR REVITALIZATION PLAN

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS/MEETINGS FOCUS GROUP: COMMUNITY GROUPS

MEETING DATE: February 8, 2023

FACILITATORS: Ryan Mawhinney, Dave Schwartz

INVITES/ATTENDEES

PRESENT	ORGANIZATION	NAME	EMAIL / CONTACT	NOTES
x	Greater Philadelphia Community Alliance (GPCA)	Anwar Mathis	AnwarMathis@gpca-phila.org	
x	Greater Philadelphia Community Alliance (GPCA)	Otis Bullock	otisbullock@gpca-phila.org	
x	Point Breeze Network Plus	Claudia Smith Sherrod	clsherrod1444@gmail.com	
	Unity in the Community	Anton Moore	Antonmoore1@gmail.com	
x	Point Breeze Community Development Coalition (CDC)	Albert Littlepage	apage1801@aol.com	
x	East Point Breeze Neighbors (EPBN)	Lydia Currie	lydia.currie@gmail.com	Friends of Wharton Square Park
	Point Breeze Civic Association	Tiffany Greene	ccpbzoning@gmail.com	
	Friends of Wharton Square Park	Demetrius Richardson	mutazz1@yahoo.com	Masjid Abdullah Bin Baaz
x	City Planning Commission Department of Planning and Development	Sarah Banh	Sarah.Banh@phila.gov	South District Planner
x	Department of Commerce	Vinh Ho	vinh.ho@phila.gov	Business Services Manager; PBA Steering Committee

MEETING SUMMARY

Project Overview and Introductions

Bergmann kicked off the meeting by explaining the project's objective, which is to develop a vision, goals, and strategies for improving and redeveloping Point Breeze Avenue to meet the needs of local business owners and better serve the neighborhood's residents. They also provided an overview of the project and outreach process, which includes monthly Steering Committee meetings, a Community Survey, Public Workshops, and these Stakeholder Focus Group meetings.

Attendees introduced themselves, provided an overview of their community organization, and briefly described their organization's programs or services to the Point Breeze neighborhood. Otis highlighted various housing and community development services provided by GPCA, including the operation of early childhood education centers, summer camps, case management for families, housing programs, counseling, and commercial corridor management. He also mentioned two ongoing rebuild projects for park and recreation center renovations.

Claudia discussed Point Breeze Network Plus' efforts to revamp the community network organization and develop a newsletter to provide information to the community. She mentioned her experience in homeownership programs and community clean-up initiatives.

Albert provided an overview of Point Breeze Community Development's programs, focusing on collaboration with other organizations, religious communities, and zoning reviews for the neighborhood between 18th and 25th Streets and Snyder and Washington Avenues.

Lydia shared information about East Point Breeze Neighborhood's programs and their focus on equitable housing and business development west of 18th Street and along the Avenue. She noted that the organization shares similar priorities as others mentioned in the meeting, some of which are to encourage mixed-use zoning, bring back essential services and businesses, support local businesses, and promote affordable housing.

Vinh emphasized the Commerce Department's role in assisting businesses by providing information on programs, resources, and funding opportunities. He highlighted the importance of developing strong business skills alongside accessing financial resources. Vinh also noted that numerous funding opportunities are available from the City, some of which may require matching funds or upfront costs. He also emphasizes the importance of being creative and collaborating directly with businesses to obtain the necessary resources and that business owners should prioritize learning essential business skills before seeking funding to increase their chances of success in the long run.

The following discussion focused on visioning, issues, and opportunities for Point Breeze Avenue and how the organizations can support local business owners to succeed and better serve the neighborhood's residents.

Visioning

Bergmann asked the group to share what they felt makes Point Breeze Avenue unique, what they like most about the Avenue, and what they want to stay the same. Claudia began by sharing her perspective on Point Breeze's historical significance. She mentioned how the Avenue served as a local Center City alternative for the community, offering various retail and services for local needs. She emphasized the absence of essential businesses like clothes, shoes, dentists, pharmacies, etc. The group then discussed the historical aspect of the area, mentioning the significant presence of black-owned and Asian-owned businesses in the past. Albert noted that historical and cultural diversity is a broad and complex topic, highlighting its uniqueness rather than a specific standout feature at the current moment, suggesting the need to delve deeper and have that conversation. They highlighted the community's cultural richness and the need to preserve and honor its historical background. There was agreement on the importance of a unified vision for the Avenue's revitalization. The group expressed a common desire for a welcoming and inclusive community with various businesses that cater to diverse needs.



Issues, Needs, and Opportunities

Bergmann then asked what barriers prevent that vision from becoming a reality and what they don't like and want to change about the Avenue. Claudia expressed the need for more diverse businesses, including stores, dentists, pharmacies, and eateries, to cater to the community's needs and reduce the need to travel outside the neighborhood. She emphasized the historical presence of businesses in the area and the desire to revive that vibrancy. Infrastructure challenges were raised, such as the Avenue being a narrow one-way street with limited parking and space for large businesses like grocery stores. Suggestions were made to consider locations for a grocery and explore smaller food retail stores.

Lydia echoed these concerns for the East Point Breeze Neighborhood, noting that residents wish not to have to travel outside their area for daily needs or visit doctors and dentists. There is a strong desire to bring back businesses, particularly through mixed-use zoning with businesses on the ground floor and apartments above. Additionally, there is a significant concern and support for increasing affordable housing options on the Avenue.

The importance of addressing loitering and ensuring a safe environment outside stores and Cassie Holley Court was discussed. The potential to utilize PHA (Philadelphia Housing Authority) properties for mixed-use development was discussed, with commercial spaces on the ground floor and senior housing on top. The significance of removing physical barriers, enhancing infrastructure, and creating anchor businesses that attract local residents and visitors from outside the neighborhood was highlighted.

Bergmann asked what physical improvements the group wanted to see to improve walkability, mobility, and aesthetics along the Avenue. The group discussed various funding and program opportunities to improve redevelopment along the Avenue. These opportunities included the Storefront Improvement and InStore Forgivable Loan programs, a business security camera program, matching grants with loans, and commercial real estate acquisition loans.

Some participants expressed concerns about the accessibility and effectiveness of these programs, mentioning red tape, mistrust in the government, and the need for streamlined processes. There were suggestions to provide more direct technical assistance to businesses, with the possibility of satellite offices or rotating loan officers from organizations like the Enterprise Center or Community First Fund. The discussion highlighted the need for programs that address the specific needs of low-income entrepreneurs and businesses and help business owners take advantage of funding programs. Participants emphasized the importance of trust-building and personal relationships to help make the funding opportunities more accessible and to help businesses navigate and understand the application process and utilize available resources effectively.

Potential Strategies

A follow-up question was how their organization could contribute to the success of overcoming the issues and the barriers and achieving the vision. The group discussed their organizations' potential contributions to help the Plan succeed, focusing on facilitating communication and collaboration among businesses, residents, and stakeholders. They emphasized the importance of building trust and relationships with the community to implement proposed projects and policies effectively.

They also highlighted the need for unity in messaging and a clear vision for the corridor's development. Some suggested critical projects and policies included zoning to establish businesses, attracting new businesses through cold calling and outreach efforts, and holding focus group meetings without consultants to ensure accountability and goal alignment. The participants expressed their willingness to continue engaging with the process and work together to support the redevelopment of Point Breeze Avenue.



The last question was, what is one critical project or policy that should be included in the redevelopment plan? A couple of participants expressed their desire for specific businesses to be returned to the Avenue, which would cater to the needs of both new and old residents and help meet daily needs, such as a dry cleaner and pharmacy.

There was also a suggestion to hold a business fair and invite potential businesses to explore opportunities in Point Breeze and gather their feedback.

One participant discussed the importance of garnering local elected officials' and philanthropic stakeholders' support to redevelop the Avenue. They mentioned the possibility of securing LSA [Local Share Account] funding from the state to help implement projects and policies to carry out the vision of the Plan.

Another critical policy mentioned was to ensure that the Point Breeze Business Association is active again to serve as a resource for potential business owners and make the most of the community's volunteer activism to help businesses and the community succeed.

The group expressed a shared hope and desire to work together to achieve their vision for the Avenue's development. They acknowledged the challenges and barriers and expressed their willingness to continue engaging with the process and work together to support the redevelopment of the Avenue.

Bergmann ended the meeting by thanking everyone for their participation and encouraging further input and feedback from the participants as the Plan progressed.

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.

