

Nueva Esperanza Housing and Economic Development, Inc.

Registered Community Organization (RCO)

October 29, 2014

Special RCO Meeting on Roberto Clemente Development

The meeting opened at 5:40pm with a welcome from Philip Dawson, Senior Director of Housing and Economic Development at NEHED.

Agenda Item 1: 4509 N. 5th Street Zoning Variance Petition

Mr. Dawson introduced Elsa and Franchesca Roig, who were required to give a presentation on their zoning variance request at a meeting of the RCO. The petition is for a variance from the zoning code to allow the operation of a dance studio on the second floor of a CMX-1 zoned building on 4509 N. 5th Street, where such a use on an upper story is prohibited under the code. Franchesca, who will run the dance studio, delivered the presentation, beginning with a description of the project and the mission statement of her studio. She described the proposed changes and provided color photographs to the community members in attendance, showing the relevant areas and demonstrating adherence to occupancy/safety requirements (a back fire stair, a fire extinguisher, a bathroom). An opportunity for questions/feedback was provided, and the following questions/answers were given:

- Q: What ages are welcome at the dance studio. A: 3 and up
- Q: Are there structured classes? A: Yes
- Q: Have you given any thought to partnering with schools or community organizations to teach dance there? A: Yes, once we get started, we are open to considering partnerships in the future.

Mr. Dawson asked if the community members who were present were supportive, neutral, or against the variance for the dance studio. Those in attendance were supportive of the project, and no opposition was voiced.

Agenda Item 2: Roberto Clemente Development

Mr. Dawson continued the meeting with a presentation on Esperanza's planned redevelopment of the former Roberto Clemente School property at 3921-61 N. 5th Street. Using a Power Point presentation to illustrate main points and images, he conveyed the following information to the attendees:

- Background: A brief history of Esperanza and its experience in affordable housing development and real estate development
- Neighborhood Plan: A description of the Hunting Park Neighborhood Strategic Plan 2022 and its findings and recommendations in regards to housing affordability and capital improvements.
- History and Existing Conditions: A history of the development site in question, its current condition, its impact on the surrounding community, and the challenges involved in redeveloping it.

- Overall Goals: Esperanza’s overall goals for redeveloping the site, including rehabilitating the physical space, creating new affordable units, creating new business space and jobs, revitalizing the surrounding neighborhood, and fitting the scale of the development to its surroundings.
- Design: Mr. Dawson showed three elevation drawings and one site plan of the proposed development prepared by PZS Architects
- Details and Amenities: Information on the number and size range of rental units, apartment amenities, common areas and commercial space, building size, and sustainable features
- Timeline: Mr. Dawson provided a general timeline explaining the stages of the project from acquisition through financing and start of construction (dependent on financing)

Mr. Dawson invited questions and comments on the project from all in attendance, and the following questions/answers were given:

- Q: Will asbestos and other dangerous substances be removed from the building before construction? A: Mr. Dawson confirmed that all required environmental remediation would take place beforehand to ensure a safe working environment for contractors, and that the housing units would be free of contaminants.
- Q: If there is such a need for affordable housing in Hunting Park, why is Esperanza demolishing part of the building and only creating three stories of apartments instead of rehabilitating four or more stories to create a much larger apartment building? A: Mr. Dawson explained that Esperanza was concerned about the potential negative effects of creating a high-rise, low-income housing development. He said that public housing agencies across the country have recognized that such structures can be problematic, that they have been demolishing high rise projects in favor of lower-density developments for decades, and that smaller developments were now considered a best practice in low-income housing. Mr. Charles Lanier, Interim Executive Director of the Hunting Park Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC), agreed, saying that he worked for the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) for many years, and that “warehousing” people in high-rise projects would not be a good move for the neighborhood. He agreed that Esperanza’s proposed development was an appropriate size.
- Q: Why isn’t Esperanza planning to sell some of the units as condos to give people a path to homeownership, rather than creating more space for renters? A: Mr. Dawson explained that Esperanza has administered a Housing Counseling program for many years, which offers mortgage counseling, foreclosure prevention, and other supportive services for those interested in homeownership. He also mentioned that Esperanza has rehabilitated and sold rowhomes in the neighborhood at below-market costs to homebuyers. However, since the Neighborhood Plan indicated that 73% of renters are cost-burdened, and since there are more renters than homeowners in the neighborhood, he said the Esperanza felt there was a greater need for affordable rental housing that could be met in this project.
- Q: How will outdoor spaces be maintained? A: Mr. Dawson answered that Esperanza’s Facilities Department would maintain the grounds, as it currently does on its other properties.

- Q: Will Esperanza give a preference to local residents for both construction jobs and apartment applications for the development? A: Mr. Dawson stated that Esperanza would work to see that local contractors are given the opportunity to participate in the project. He said that Esperanza would publicize the rental application process intensively in the Hunting Park community in order to ensure that residents are aware of it.
- Q: How many of the 38 units will receive a PHA subsidy? A: Mr. Dawson was unaware of the exact number of units that would receive the PHA subsidy, but pledged to find the answer and follow up.
- Q: Can Esperanza offer a training or orientation for renters who are selected to live in the Clemente building, teaching them how to be good neighbors in a multi-tenant building and how to become active in their community? A: Mr. Dawson agreed that this was a good idea and said that Esperanza would look into the possibility.

Mr. Dawson provided his contact information, including email address and phone number, to all in attendance and encouraged them to contact him with any additional questions or comments they may have. The individuals in attendance thanked him for the information and declared that they were pleased with the project as described, and that they looked forward to hearing additional news of it as it progressed. Mr. Lanier of the Hunting Park NAC suggested that Esperanza could hold another community meeting if it receives LIHTC funding. Mr. Dawson thanked all for attending the meeting and the session came to a close.