

BELLA VISTA

NEIGHBORS ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 63955, Philadelphia, PA 19147
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www.bellavistaneighbors.org

Bella Vista Neighbors Association, formerly known as Bella Vista Town Watch, is an independent non-profit neighborhood organization. Our goal is to improve the quality of life for all residents of Bella Vista.

Hon. Frank DiCicco
Chair, Philadelphia Zoning Board of Adjustment
One Parkway Building, 1515 Arch Street, 18th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

April 23, 2018

Re: **RCO Meeting Summary Form**
ZBA Calendar No. 33278 Zoning Application No. 853026
630-38 Christian St./ ZBA hearing date: April 25, 2018, 2:00 pm
Applicant: Michael Phillips, Esq. for Lawrence A. Gatta

Dear Mr. DiCicco:

Below is a summary of our public community meeting held regarding the above referenced zoning application.

Position:	Opposed
Date of Meeting:	April 3, 2018
Location of Meeting:	Palumbo Recreation Center, 10 th & Fitzwater Streets.
Participating RCO:	Bella Vista Neighbors Association (BVNA) Zoning Committee
Number of Attendees:	Approximately 40 excluding zoning committee members

Reason for Position:

The applicant seeks to consolidate three existing lots into one, raze the existing structures, and to construct seven (7) dwelling units with ten (10) accessory parking garage spaces to be accessed from a narrow shared central driveway opening to Christian St. The application has been refused for lack of rear yard depth and rear yard area, where 9 ft. and 144 sq. ft. each are required respectively, and for a proposed roof height of 42 ft. exceeding the maximum of 38 ft. allowed.

Given that the proposed consolidated corner lot is large and dimensionally roughly square in form, BVNA questioned the applicant about the unusual "gated community" central driveway concept plan layout with overly tall small footprint houses that lack private yard space and why the project could not have been more conventionally oriented with houses running north to south to front the two-way arterial Christian Street and to have a shared driveway accessed from the lesser one-way 7th Street.

As discussed at the meeting, currently there are no other similarly overly tall "gated community" type projects in the Bella Vista; however, there exist two somewhat recent similar developments in the adjacent communities of Hawthorne and Queen Village that each required numerous zoning variances for approval. And both of which that now serve as "challenges" to their respective residents, vicinities and communities.

As has been subsequently observed, given the narrow internally oriented shared driveways, these types of overly tall developments create a "canyon effect" with some of the houses having mostly one-way close-up internal views only of the opposing dwellings. The excessive height and bulk of these buildings block views and cast long shadows on many of the surrounding existing more modestly scaled homes. These "gated communities" do not easily allow for delivery or service contractors or guests to visit and to park conveniently within the site, and often the driveways and streets fronting these developments can get congested with the double-parking of such visitors and vehicles. In addition, the proposed lot configuration of small house footprints creates first floors that are mostly consumed by their parking garages, thus removing "eyes" from the street at grade level, creating "dead zones" along the fronting sidewalks.

BVNA expressed concerns about the location of the proposed gated driveway entrance along Christian Street. BVNA feels that the near proximity of the proposed driveway (+/-45') to the busy intersection at 7th street could create a challenge for residents to cross two-way traffic to enter and exit the development, and that could also create a hazard to potentially interfere with, and back-up, the stacking of cars at and approaching the intersection. A differently oriented development with a proposed rear/south-end shared driveway along 7th Street would be thus a preferable alternative with the access point at approximately 75' from the intersection, and along a lesser traveled one-way street.

The applicant suggested that the proposed project new "front" orientation from Christian Street to 7th Street, and the lot depth in the east to west direction, made the provision for rear yard space "impossible" and that the total open space offered of 29% (shared driveway area only) exceeded the 20% requirement. The applicant indicated that the zoning relief sought was necessary to make this "low-density" configuration of seven (7) dwellings with off-street parking financially more viable, as compared to a fully compliant as-of-right RM-1 district fourteen (14) unit condominium or apartment project.

Though the applicant mentioned the existing context of the historic overly tall former school, now condominium building, directly opposite and along the north side of Christian Street, neighbors who spoke at the meeting most frequently expressed concerns over the impact of the proposed project height upon their properties. Several neighbors were also concerned with the position and effect of the 10' tall pilot houses on top of the proposed 42 ft. roof height. A majority of both near and community wide neighbors voted to oppose the application with a combined count of 18 to 11. Affected residents (those within 250 ft) opposed the proposal 6 to 5, with those in favor primarily citing their preference for the development of private homes as compared to a larger as-of-right multi-unit dwelling project that could appeal to renters. Other community wide residents who attended the meeting opposed the proposal, 12 to 6.

BVNA shares the immediate neighbor's concern with the impact of the excessive bulk and height of the proposed structure to available light and openness; a scale of development that runs counter to the existing scale and dimensional allowances of the zoning districts within our community. Relocating the pilot houses may mitigate the excessive bulk but does not eliminate this effect. The proposed project is more well suited to a much denser urban environment with a higher zoning district classification, such as CMX-2.5, a zoning district only found within Bella Vista along the high density commercially oriented South Street and Washington Avenue.

Though the applicant insisted that more open space than required has been offered, BVNA feels that the quality and use of that internal open area (as a driveway only) runs counter to the intent of the zoning code to require real private yard space for residents, and to create rear yard setbacks that provide some distance from adjacent dwellings and yards, especially to the south of the site, a vicinity of narrow streets and modestly scaled houses. BVNA feels that the provision of 5th floor level roof decks as the primary private outdoor spaces for these proposed dwellings is not acceptable for new single family home residential development in our community when more conventional housing types, with more conventional open spaces, have been eminently viable on similarly conforming lot types and sizes.

Finally, the committee notes that the applicant did not provide any evidence of hardship, as outlined in the Philadelphia Zoning Code Section 14-301(8)(e)(1)(a), or with respect to Section 910.2 of the PA Municipalities Planning Code that lays out the conditions required for the granting of a variance. In fact, the applicant acknowledged that they weren't presenting a hardship but were asking for the variances to make this project more financially viable and profitable.

BVNA believes that the proposed internally oriented site dwelling layout with a shared "gated" private driveway is an inappropriate housing development type for our community. A clear majority combined vote count of all neighbors and zoning committee members voiced a unified opposition to the application. The height of the proposed structure is excessive, the lack of open space adversely affects the future dwelling residents and current neighbors, and the applicant did not demonstrate a hardship with respect to the physical conditions of the lot itself. Therefore, BVNA is **Opposed** to this application.

As always, we thank you for considering our report of the meeting discussion, and of our opinion in the matter.

Respectfully submitted,

Bella Vista Neighbors Association, Inc.



By: _____

Lawrence Weintraub AIA
Co-Chair, BVNA Zoning Committee

cc: *The Hon. Mark Squilla c/o (Marie.Beren@phila.gov), BVNA Zoning Committee, rco.notification@phila.gov, wardleader@philadelphia2ndwardgop.com, ZBA Kariyma.Quintana@phila.gov, Michael Phillips, Esq.(Michael.Phillips@Obermayer.com) for Lawrence A Gatta*
encl: *Zoning Meeting Agenda Poster, Zoning Meeting Sign-in Sheets*

RCO Meeting Summary Form to Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA)

Bella Vista Neighbors Association Zoning Committee

PO Box 63955
Philadelphia, PA 19147

April 23, 2018

Hon. Frank DiCicco
Chair, Zoning Board of Adjustment
One Parkway Building, 1515 Arch Street, 18th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Re: RCO Meeting Summary Form

ZBA Appeal Number: 33278
Zoning Application Number: 853026
630-638 Christian Street
April 25, 2018, 2:00 pm

Dear Mr. DiCicco:

Below is summary of a public community meeting held regarding the above-referenced zoning application.

Final Position Taken by Coordinating RCO is one of:

- Support
- Oppose**
- Non-Opposition
- Did not reach agreement on the application

Vote Counts:

	RCO Board/ Committee	Meeting Attendees	Other Additional Meeting Attendees: Immediate (flyered within 250') neighbors
<i>Support</i>	0	6	5
<i>Oppose</i>	8	12	6
<i>Non-Opposition</i>			

Date of Meeting: April 3, 2018

Location of Meeting: Palumbo Recreation Center, NEC 10th & Fitzwater Streets.

Participating RCO: Bella Vista Neighbors Association Zoning Committee (BVNA)

Total Number of Attendees: 40 (Excluding BVNA Zoning Committee members)

Letter with Explanation of/Rationale for Position Attached.

Sincerely,

Bella Vista Neighbors Association, Inc.



By: _____

Lawrence Weintraub AIA
Co-Chair, BVNA Zoning Committee

cc: *The Hon. Mark Squilla c/o Marie Beren Marie.Beren@phila.gov,
Planning Commission - rco.notification@phila.gov
ZBA Kariyma.Quintana@phila.gov,
Applicant: Michael Phillips (Michael.Phillips@Obermayer.com) for Lawrence A. Gatta*