

DAGchair

MARCH 22 2012

MEETING OF MARCH 1, 2012

This is an anecdotal account of the last meeting written by the chair, to be published each month. These notes are intended to update people who were not able to attend the meeting. They are not intended to be minutes. If anyone has items to add or correct, please contact me. It is also intended to be a heads up about current and upcoming DAG issues. As always, tips, gossip and ideas are welcome.

PRESENTATION BY JOHNSTON STROMBERG ARCHITECTURE

Thank you to Brian Johnston and Christopher Stromberg for joining us to discuss Carpenter Square. They are a part of a team headed by Graduate Partners LP and selected by the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority to transform a vacant parcel of land at 1001-1035 S. 17th St. into a sustainable mixed-use development. The development includes 2,000 square feet of commercial space, 11 single-family rowhouses, 6 condominiums, neighborhood open space and off-street parking. If you missed it, have a look at their slide show on this website.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Laura Spina gave an update on DAGtag and the Postcard Project. DAGtag is a new website feature that allows readers to post photos of buildings or urban spaces with comments about why they find them wonderful or awful. The Postcard Project will feature an exhibit at the Center for Architecture from July 30 to September 16 of photos of admirable buildings of the last ten years as submitted by the public.

Next American City is encouraging efforts to have I-95 rebuilt below grade, and recently hosted an event about cities that have reworked their downtown highways - <http://americancity.org/buzz/entry/3391/>. Executive Director Diana Lind will keep DAG posted on further developments and opportunities for involvement.

From March 19 to April 5 the folks formerly known as the Zoning Code Commission will host comment sessions on the sign controls, prior to consideration of the second draft of sign control language at PCPC on April 17. A DAG issue committee will be formed.

LAND BANK ISSUE COMMITTEE

To quote astronaut Dr. Mae Jemison, we need to be “short term pessimists and long term optimists”. Dr. Jemison would never have set foot in that space shuttle if she didn’t have great optimism about the safety and importance of space exploration. But you can be sure that she spent a lot of time before and during flight checking her equipment to see what might go wrong.

A land bank that would get vacant properties in Philadelphia back into use is generally agreed to be a terrific idea, and there are proposals on the table from the administration and City Council. We need to examine those proposals in a frankly cranky and pessimistic way. What could go wrong? Who could cause mischief? What political favors could be asked for and given? Will the process be fair, transparent and predictable? And then we need to work optimistically to encourage a fair process and a plan that will result in the most generous possible buildings – ones that add value and character to their neighborhoods and to the city.

The issue committee includes George Clafen, David Feldman, Terry Gillen, John Kromer, Rick Sauer, Craig Schelter and me.

APRIL 5 MEETING

A panel of speakers will discuss the City Council land bank proposals and the administration’s Front Door policy, allowing time for group discussion of the issues.

- Jennifer Kates, Legislative Assistant to Councilwoman Maria Quinones-Sanchez

- John Carpenter, Deputy Executive Director, Neighborhood Stabilization Program and Land Policy, Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority
- Jeff Allegretti, President of Innova, housing development services

We will begin at 8:00 sharp at the Center for Architecture, 1218 Arch Street. All are welcome. [Please also see John Kromer's new DAGspace article on land banking.](#)

CHAIR'S REMARKS

Elise Vider recently posted an excellent piece in DAGspace about the history and mission of DAG. Be sure to read it and mentally (or actually) thank those people who have made this all endure. I would like to thank loudly all those folks, and especially our outgoing chair, Joanne Aitken, previous chairs Alan Greenberger and Bill Becker, and our two indispensable vice-chairs – David Brownlee and George Claflen. Incredibly, this is an organization with no membership requirements, no dues, not much of a structure and no revenue stream, until recently when the William Penn Foundation gave us money for some activities and our now-essential intern Anna Ishii. DAG has risen to a level of prominence as a voice for good design in the city. We have had a notable impact on important projects like the Jefferson parking garage on Chestnut Street. So what should DAG do to honor our tenth anniversary together? Let's not try to reinvent ourselves. Let's build on who and what we are, and then.....let's take it up a notch! Here are three ideas.

FIRST, in talking to people about DAG, a recurring theme is the need for our group to be way out in front on issues. Hence our discussion about current land bank proposals. When a project is past the preliminary stages, it doesn't do much good for us to talk about it. It's just too late. So let's all monitor agenda lists for the Planning Commission, the Historical Commission, the Art Commission, the ZBA, the Redevelopment Authority and the Civic Design Review Committee, once that is formed, and go to any meetings that our schedules allow.

What else can we do? My favorite idea is courtesy of a friend from the Big Island of Hawaii. It's called Aloha Friday. Go out for Happy Hours with your friends. (Admit it. Most of your friends are as wonkish as you are.) Gossip. Eavesdrop. Let us know what's up.

SECOND, make time for DAG. Set aside the first Thursday at 8 AM every month. For our part, we will start every meeting at 8 AM sharp, and have a break point just before 9 AM for those of you who have to leave then for work. For those of you who can stay, we will make sure that we finish the program by 9:30. Take another half hour during the month to read the website, or send in ideas, or follow up on some new project. Then maybe once or twice a year, go a bit extra. Write something for DAG Space, join an issue committee or research a new project that we should be following.

THIRD, go horizontal. We need to concentrate on those opportunities that are being lost because of vertical thinking and turf wars, either by each of us personally or what in what we observe among city decision-makers. We cannot afford to think of architectural expression, urban design, planning, sustainability, transportation, parks, historic preservation, economic development and social justice as separate issues. We cannot afford to let City decision-makers inhabit their individual silos too comfortably.

Thanks to you all for your time and energy. Aloha.

Kiki Bolender

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