

Advocacy Group Wants New Plan for Downtown Philadelphia Parking Garage

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by Linda K. Harris

Jul. 16--A large volunteer group made up of architects, city planners and developers will ask that today's zoning hearing for a controversial garage project on Chestnut Street be postponed, so that the group can create an alternative design proposal free of charge.

The Design Advocacy Group, chaired by architect William P. Becker, will send architects George L. Claflen Jr. and Edwin Bronstein to the Philadelphia Zoning Board of Adjustment to make the offer. The move is a last-ditch effort to change the design and location of the garage proposed by Thomas Jefferson University Hospital and its partner, InterPark.

The eight-level, 700-space garage is proposed for the south side of the 900 block of Chestnut Street. It is part of a redevelopment project that is linked with the renovation of the stately but dilapidated Victory Building at 10th and Chestnut.

The current design for the garage would require at least seven zoning variances.

The location of the garage also is of paramount concern, as the East of Broad neighborhood in Center City attempts to join in the city's revitalization. The Design Advocacy Group would like to see the garage located on Sansom Street instead, to keep Chestnut Street pedestrian-friendly.

"We, at no charge, are offering to prepare alternate approaches to the site and to illustrate that there are better ways to do this," Becker said yesterday.

Carl Primavera, a high-profile zoning attorney representing InterPark, responded by saying that the planners had met with Design Advocacy Group representatives and listened to their ideas but could not agree to their request to move the garage from its planned location on Chestnut Street.

"We've had the benefit of their wisdom and thinking," Primavera said. "We would tell them that we have considered those proposals, and there were factors that wouldn't allow us to do it that way."

Primavera said the garage could not be on Sansom Street because the street was used by hospital ambulances, but he said other ideas were accepted.

"Their point of view has helped shape the project," Primavera said.

Clafien, who chairs Design Advocacy Group's Jefferson garage subcommittee, scoffed at Primavera's statement.

"There was one meeting with Jefferson, at which they basically told us what they were going to do," Clafien said. Today's zoning hearing is scheduled for 12:30 p.m. at 1515 Arch St., on the 18th floor. To see more of The Philadelphia Inquirer, or to subscribe to the newspaper, go to <http://www.philly.com> (c) 2003, The Philadelphia Inquirer. Distributed by Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News