

THE DUST BEGINS TO FLY

After an extended period of quiet, commercial development has begun on Coventry once more. All sorts of dust is flying, as various people saw wood and pick old plans and reports off shelves. The recent Coventryard fire gave much needed impetus to several projects, injecting a certain urgency into matters. Other projects have been going for some time, but are soon to reach completion.

Most noteworthy is the proposal of Roger Ritley for re-development of commercial space near Coventryard to provide stores for tenants burned out by the fire. The problem of a parking variance request here has been eased by the extinction of the Coventryard variance. Mr. Ritley's proposal will be discussed at the next CHI meeting, at which time Mr. Ritley will answer any questions about his project.

Also on the CHI agenda is discussion about a request for a parking variance of 50 spaces by a company which wishes to operate a franchise Master Pizza carryout. This store would be located at 1787 Coventry Road, between Pee Wee's Bicycle Shop and Herbert Ascherman Photography. Because of several recent parking variances on this north part of the commercial strip, the proposal has aroused controversy. A speaker has indicated his intention to represent the views of the Master Pizza proposal to CHI.

Both the Ritley proposal and the Master Pizza proposal will be considered at public hearings before the Cleveland Heights Board of Zoning Appeals on Wednesday, March 15, at 7:30 p. m. Hearings are held in the Council Chamber at City Hall. CHI will discuss its public positions on these proposals (if any) at its March 14th meeting.

In addition to these projects, a new "import" store is being prepared for the old Ward's Folly location and the Coventry Legal Clinic has opened its doors. Tommy's tentatively plans on opening of some facilities in mid-to-late March. Rumors have it that some unspecified tenant has been found for the old, burned out Water Works store location.

On the minus side, Casbah closed its doors for good last month. Also, the Master Pizza proposal endangers the continued existence of a shoe repair shop which is one of the last of the old-time Coventry businesses. But overall, the commercial scene on Coventry is brighter than it has been for months. The prospect of federal community development block grant funds coming to Coventry makes the future seem brighter still.

- Alan Rapoport

The next meeting of Coventry Neighbors, Inc. will take place on Tuesday, March 14, 1978, at 8:00 p.m. at the Unitarian Society, Lancashire Road, directly across from Musicians' Tower.

The Paradoxical Prospects of Coventryard

Everyone on the street and in the neighborhood wants to know: What's going to happen now to Coventryard? Unclear though the answer is, the paradoxes and ironies are quite apparent.

The state of the building, and the prospects of any construction on the same site, are far from conducive to optimism. Yet Coventryard developer, Lewis Zipkin, describing himself as "overwhelmed" by expressions of support from the community, is seeking whatever options he can find to revive the site. And there's one Yard merchant who isn't even out of business! The surviving shopkeeper is, of course, Rocco's Market. Located in a freestanding building in the middle of the Yard, Rocco was spared the flames and the worst of the smoke damage. He is still in business. His position now, however, is not in the middle of a thriving community mall, but isolated from the street and surrounded by a gutted ruin. A new sign in the window of Carol Lindemuth's gives Rocco some badly needed street exposure, but his situation is not helped by everyone thinking of Coventryard strictly in the past tense.

Prospects for the mall building proper are as grim as the building now looks. The top story was razed to remove a public hazard. All this means now is that if the structure does collapse, it will do so inwardly upon itself rather than outwardly. Windows and entrances are sealed, and occupancy for any purpose is stringently forbidden.

An engineer engaged by the City has certified that the mall building has lost at least 90% of its value. Under law, when such a loss exceeds 60%, all parking variances extended to the site are "extinguished." (Variances are legal permission to be below code in parking.) Thus the large variance that Zipkin received to begin Coventryard in the first place--over 100 spaces--has gone up in the same smoke as the Yard.

Furthermore, that variance was on top of a special dispensation given under the same zoning law that prescribes how much parking a facility must provide. The zoning law, enacted in 1948, does not apply to structures erected before that date. Virtually everything on Coventry stip was built much earlier, when the automobile was a luxury if not a curiosity. The "extinguished" Coventryard variance was in addition to this exemption. But if a new building is put up on the mall site--and any salvage of the old structure seems most unlikely--it will be new construction and not automatically eligible for the exemption.

The City would have to extend a sizable variance to any new mall for it to reopen. By then, a large variance may already have been granted to the Ritley proposal that would get many of the Yard merchants back into business soon in a neighboring building. City Hall might well boggle at such a concentration of legalized deficits in parking.

But Lewis A. Zipkin, the man who must pull some decision out of this muddle, refuses to be discouraged. Reached for a telephone interview by the Coventry Village News, Zipkin said, "I have received tremendous community support, tremendous merchant support, and the City has indicated support. I am overwhelmed." This includes merchants previously critical of Zipkin's operations, Zipkin said, and some merchants who before the fire doubted the contribution of Coventryard to the commercial area now report their traffic down and are anxious to see some restoration.

Opinion: The Library Board Does It Again

"If the levy doesn't pass, you will get nothing--or less. If it does pass, there are no promises." This is essentially what the Board is saying to Coventry voters in their current budget for 1978, and in their levy request for an additional .5 mills in the years 1979 - 1983. It is exactly what was said in 1973, just prior to the sale of our library building.

CAVEAT EMPTOR is my advice. But I will vote for it, and I hope you do too, for the same reason you would fork over if somebody held a gun to your head; there is no reasonable alternative.

Still, nothing says you have to view the party with the gun as a benefactor, or as possessed of wisdom which will never be yours. One of the baffling features of Library Board psychology is that they seem to wish to be viewed thus, in spite of their AWFUL track record with this community, and in spite of their nearly unrelieved history of tactlessness, condescension, manipulation and gratuitous rudeness. Recent personal experiences reveal they are still into this curious negative PR, which is not only sad, but nearly incomprehensible.

On the other hand, in a year of constant attendance at Board meetings and meetings of the Lay Committee for Library Planning, one does discern at least minor league changes in attitude, and even some promissory notes. There is evidence that a few Board members are using their own heads instead of resting easy with the borrowed brain of Miss Cody, as was formerly the case. We are also reliably informed that even this redoubtable administrator may now believe that anger about what was pulled at Coventry is shared by more than the vocal few.

As to promissory notes, there are in the report of the Lay Committee some implicit promises to Coventry, which were quite explicit in Committee sessions, not soon to be forgotten by those who were there, including Paul Salipante, Rose Perlman and myself. These same plans are embodied in the monetary projection used to justify the Levy. However, note that nothing of substance is affirmed by the Board, for the report of the Lay Committee, even though it was chaired by Board members Fredman and Fulton, is unofficial, has not been specifically dealt with at Board meetings, and therefore can be easily left to dry up and blow away. (This is probably to be its fate, though I might be pleasantly surprised. Read it anyway, at any library location, especially pages 5-7 and appendix B, Exhibit 2, pages 46-61.) Similarly, even the inclusion of considerable 'maybe' money for Coventry in the levy projection has been done in such a way that the Board could divert it to other uses and suffer only embarrassment.

What does this all mean, Library fans? Well, it means you should get out and vote in the rain if the above inspires enthusiasm. If not, you will probably want to vote for the levy anyway. BUT, that doesn't mean you should do so dumb and happy.

So, in subsequent issues, more enlightenment will be offered, in palatable doses, to be sure. It is an interesting story, really, having more to do with ambition, laziness and noblesse oblige than with anything one could call conscious evil. Regrettably, results are about the same.

As a teaser, bet you didn't know that \$1,374,375 has been spent on the already palatial Main Library in the last four years, since the levy was first passed, over the 1973 levels! That is 80.75% of the available 'new' funds and significantly more than the entire levy collection in those years! More in our next.

- Rich Wortman

COVENTRY PTA MEETING ON LIBRARY LEVY

The Coventry PTA will sponsor a public meeting to discuss the proposed 1.7 mill levy for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library on the June 6 ballot. This levy, if passed, will provide for a 1.2 mill renewal and a .5 mill addition.

Program planners state that the levy will be presented "as a controversy," with different points of view to be stated by various speakers. Questions and comments from the audience are invited. Coventry PTA President Veronica Hill will preside over the meeting.

The event will occur on Tuesday night, March 28th at 8:00 p.m. in the All-Purpose Room of Coventry Elementary School. Any interested persons may attend. For more details, contact June Wortman at 321-0246.

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More on Coventry Library...

Mrs. Nancy Nyren, our Coventry Librarian for the last two and one half years, is resigning to move East with her husband. Her last day of work is March 23rd. Why not stop in and thank her for doing such a tremendous job. It may be a long time before we see her equal.

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Letter from Oxford Neighbors, Inc.:

February 16, 1978

At the Oxford Neighbors Executive meeting held on February 9 our discussion turned to the tragic fire at Coventryard Mall. We see the loss not only to the Coventry residents but also as a loss to the entire City. We in Oxford have looked at the Coventry business district as a sign of hope for our own merchant area. The Executive Committee directed me to write to you and pledge our moral support.

We were very concerned about the effect of the fire on the next Coventry Fair. A suggestion was made at the meeting and I would like to share it with you: possibly Coventry Neighbors would consider enlisting the aid, support, etc. from the other merchant districts through the other Neighborhood Associations.

If there is anything we can do, please give me a call.

Sincerely, Barbara Kuzma, Chairman, Oxford Neighbors, Inc.

Editor's Note: I thought we should reprint in full this very nice and highly appreciated letter to CNI from another neighborhood group. Several other neighborhood leaders have been similarly supportive.

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ITEM: In Coventry, over the past several months, more than \$200,000 has been invested in the commercial area.

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HAMPSHIRE NEIGHBORS MEET WITH THE CITY

On February 23, representatives of Hampshire Neighbors met with Acting City Manager Donald Barclay, Assistant to the City Manager Mark Levin, and George Hills, head of Inspectional Services, to discuss lower Hampshire Road (between Coventry and Overlook) exterior code enforcement problems that were in need of immediate attention and also to acquire a better understanding of the City's code enforcement procedure.

Of late, lower Hampshire has been looking a bit shabby. Trash, including garbage, stoves, couches, and other junk is put on treelawns at anytime and often sits for weeks. Lobby doors and some individual apartment windows have been missing since the Great January Blizzard. Needless to say, this general lack of housekeeping, if left unchecked, will have a detrimental effect not only on Hampshire, but on the entire Coventry neighborhood and Cleveland Heights as well.

Hampshire Neighbors found that large objects such as stoves and couches are picked up for a five dollar fee. Money must be paid to the City of Cleveland Heights before pick-up. If the fee is not paid, the items generally tend to sit on the lawn until the City finds someone to pay. In reality, the whole street pays because they must live with eyesores for weeks at a time.

Mr. Hills revealed that the Coventry area had been without an inspector for a number of weeks due to an employee promotion. A new inspector is expected to hit the streets by March 6. Mr. Hills also expressed that the inspection process will improve once the City starts using data processing equipment in the near future.

How does the inspection process work? When a complaint is made, an inspector is sent out to investigate the situation. If a citation is necessary, the property owner has a legal minimum of 10 days, but is generally given 30 days to correct the problem. Emergency situations must be taken care of immediately. If the situation is not corrected, the case is finally turned over to the Housing Court. Records of the Housing Court are open for public inspection. Inspectional Services information is considered confidential. For the most part, residents do not have any way of monitoring the complaint procedure until the case reaches Housing Court.

In order for the inspection service process to work correctly, residents must be willing to submit complaints to Inspectional Services. Mr. Hills stated that his department receives few complaints from the Coventry area residents. Hampshire Neighbors feels that this may be in part due to the fact that many renters have a fear of being evicted or having their rents raised.

Hampshire Neighbors is a street association that serves Hampshire Road west of Coventry, and Hampshire Lane. Hampshire Neighbors strives to keep the Hampshire area informed and involved in issues that affect the neighborhood and greater Cleveland Heights.

- Charles Owen

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