

# Proposed Redevelopment of Lawrenceville Church Moving Forward

By Carolyn Ristau *The Bulletin*

Lawrenceville – E Properties and Development approached the Lawrenceville Planning Team in the spring with a proposal for redeveloping the former Holy Family Church, 250-256 44th St., into apartments. After several community meetings, many residents surrounding the property continued to express strong opposition to the development.

The Lawrenceville Planning Team consists of representatives from Lawrenceville United (LU), Lawrenceville Corporation (LC), the Lawrenceville Stakeholders, Councilman Patrick Dowd's office and Pittsburgh Department of City Planning. The planning team works with developers to "steward the community plan and steward good development in Lawrenceville," said Lauren Byrne, executive director of LU.

"The community plan isn't explicit [on projects like] this," said Matthew Galluzzo, executive director of LC. Therefore, the planning team encouraged E Properties and Development to meet with the community, but with the caution that residents would be concerned over the density of the site.

The Holy Family Church site consists of a church building, school, parish house and parking lot. The plan that E Properties and Development and Landmark Design Associates (LDA), the project architect, developed after feedback from multiple

meetings with LU, LC and the Lawrenceville Planning Team called for a total of 73 units in the three buildings, 88 parking spots for cars and 21 for bikes. This would require building two additional stories on the school and an additional parking level. When presented to 120 local residents on July 20, the community expressed strong opposition to this plan. Some concerns expressed were related to public safety, particularly for pedestrians, with the increase in cars in the area, the density of the site and the ratio of parking spaces to units.

As a result of these concerns, E Properties and Development removed the project from the City's Zoning Board of Adjustment agenda and worked with LU and LC to set up four smaller community meetings and a fifth "report-back" community-wide meeting. Emeka Onwugbenu, CEO of E Properties and Development, explained that at the meetings "what was important for us was what [the residents] wanted. We believe in transparency in development."

Byrne said that at the community meetings E Properties and Development presented alternative plans "to see if they address the initial concerns voiced." The first alternative plan proposes 59 units complemented by 42 parking spaces for cars



ABOVE: Former Holy Family Church and parish house. Photo by Carolyn Ristau

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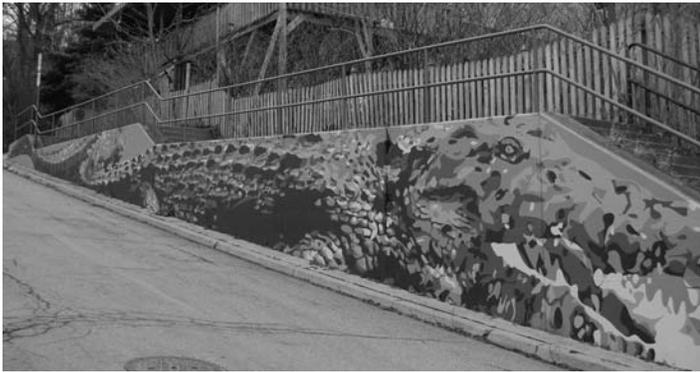


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ABOVE: Rosetta Street steps, painted by Garfield artist Chris St. Pierre. Photo by Paula Martinac

public steps, have the word try painted on each riser. "I liked that people had taken care of them."

Flott started an organization called Community Steps Cooperative (CSC) to promote the local use and maintenance of the city's steps. The mission statement on CSC's website is "to engage communities in the maintenance and improvement of the City of Pittsburgh's public steps."

Begun in October 2011, CSC is still making its own first steps. It has a website, Facebook page, board and funding. Alex Lake, executive director of CSC, said the group expects to get a P.O. box and will be applying for nonprofit status.

Lake came to Pittsburgh three and a half years ago to work at the Union Project through the Pittsburgh Urban Leadership Service Experience (PULSE). Now, at CSC, he said, "It's neat to be part of something that's just beginning."

CSC will host its first volunteer workdays this fall. There are three workdays planned for the neighborhoods of Troy Hill, Oakland and Polish Hill. Lake explained these areas were chosen for having unique views of the city and having multiple staircases in close proximity. He said the goal of the workdays is to "make the steps more appealing to residents and visitors" by maintaining and repainting them as needed and "to get

people to come to steps they might not otherwise come across or use."

Lake noted that CSC hopes to have more workdays in the future in different locations, including other East End neighborhoods. In the meantime, he explained CSC will be working on additional initiatives for promoting the city steps. He discussed "assisting community members with ideas they have for their steps" and awareness programming such as "an art exhibit or something else not at a step site."

Flott explained, "We don't want to take over other people's projects. We really like that certain communities take care of their spaces. We want to help them make it easier."

This fall, Lake will be moving back to Garfield after living temporarily in Lawrenceville. The house he is moving to is on Rosetta Street, "near the alligator steps." These steps are the feature image on CSC's Facebook page. Flott said, "They are a good example of how you bring attention to your steps."

"[The steps] are a quirky Pittsburgh thing," Lake said. "It's the kind of thing that makes cities unique."

If you have a project for some city steps or want more information on volunteering with CSC, visit [www.cscpg.org](http://www.cscpg.org) or email Alex Lake at [alex@cscpg.org](mailto:alex@cscpg.org). ♦

## Catering Company Opens on Main Street

By Samantha McDonough  
Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

Bloomfield – Roxanne Easley isn't new to catering. She began in 2006, by delivering dinners to small businesses in the East End, while working full-time at High-mark.

Then, after working at the insurance company for 10 years, she lost her job in 2008. Encouraged by fellow church members and friends, she began to consider opening her own catering business.

With help from some small business classes, Easley decided to pursue her dream, naming her venture "Roxanne's Soul Food Expressions." Through word of mouth, she was soon busy enough to support herself solely with her catering gigs. For four years, she didn't pick up another job. According to her website, the business serves everything: "a dinner for 2 or a banquet of 500."

In April 2011, on a drive down Main Street, Easley saw a sign in the window that caught her eye. The former pizza-shop site at 4124 Main St. was available for lease. She wanted to stay in the East End area, and felt fortunate to have found a property where the price was right, so she signed a lease right away.

After that, she says everything seemed to come together. She did the work little by little over a year, mostly by herself, to become "Roxanne's Catering and Take Out." Her opening was Aug. 15, 2012.

Of the name change, she says, "I figured I would take out the 'Soul Food,'



ABOVE: Roxanne Easley in front of her new establishment. Photo by Samantha McDonough

because, well, I do more than soul food." She says she doesn't want to be boxed in by that label and is able to provide a wide range of delicious food.

Items are prepared in advance, and customers can either walk in or call to order from her menu, which includes vegetarian options, croissant sandwiches and desserts. She also offers different daily specials.

Easley reports she has lots of ideas and plans for community-related events and gatherings she hopes to host in the future. In addition, a new website is in the works.

For more information, visit [www.rsecatering.com](http://www.rsecatering.com) or call 412-315-7471. ♦

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and 17 for bikes. In the plan, no additions are required for either the parking lot or the school. The second alternative plan proposes 68 apartments with 88 parking spots for cars and 21 for bikes. This plan uses an additional level of parking, but only one additional story on the school building.

Onwugbenu explained that potential alternative parking strategies were also discussed with residents. These strategies included restrictions preventing tenants from parking on the streets, discounts for tenants without cars, a second-car fee and a Zip car station. He said, "People liked these ideas."

Byrne explained that of the three options presented, the original and the two alternatives, the community tended to prefer the second alternative plan. However, she said, "Given the option between one of these plans and none, none was chosen."

According to Byrne, LU and LC "wanted to create consensus around one plan." After getting the feedback from the meetings, she said, "LU cannot publicly support one of

the three plans because there is no consensus."

Onwugbenu told *The Bulletin* he is continuing to meet with residents and get additional feedback as his company and LDA try to develop "the optimal solution – the very best that is achievable." He listed five issues they are addressing: less density, more parking, whether or not to include an addition, dumpster placement and the ability for the apartments to become condos in the future.

At press time, a final plan was not completed. Onwugbenu said, "We will definitely communicate the plan before going to zoning." He described his intent to issue public documents with the details of the final design, "let it circulate and be discussed" and then follow this up with a community Q&A session. "Our goal is to take the plan to zoning in September," he said.

For updates on the project, contact LU at [info@Lunited.org](mailto:info@Lunited.org) or 412-802-7220. ♦



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