



December 22, 2021

Friends of Vernon Park is committed to the goal of a more open and equitable process for all stakeholders regarding development of the former YWCA Building.

Though the December 7 community meeting was problematic for a number of reasons, we are encouraged by the commitments from both PRA and Councilwoman Bass to facilitate/participate in an open, transparent, inclusive process regarding next steps. This component has been sorely lacking in the past, which has manifested in the climate of distrust, divestment, and confusion we are experiencing today. We are also encouraged by the majority of folks at the meeting showing support for prioritizing affordable housing for this project. In the 6 years that the building has been under contract but dormant, housing costs in Germantown have skyrocketed.

Because of this increasing trend, the sooner this building is renovated to meet the needs of the community, including affordable housing, the better.

It is also crucial that we acknowledge and deepen our focus towards the intersectional elements at work here, including race, and do the work to have good-faith, challenging and necessary conversations to support action and improved conditions. It is not just about this building.

We do not expect developers to lead the way in writing, passing and enforcing policies to address structural issues and community concerns regarding equity and affordability. **That is the role and responsibility of our elected and public officials—to serve and represent the interests of the people** with transparency and full accountability.

How can we collectively support existing Black-owned development groups (preferably who are from Philadelphia, especially Germantown) as well as foster opportunities for BIPOC community members to grow their businesses and generate opportunities in this space? How can we collectively support development that builds wealth but not at the expense of displacing members of our community who are [especially vulnerable](#) to rising housing costs. Would the recently passed [mixed-income overlay bill](#) work for Germantown? How about [Community Benefits Agreements](#)? There are models for solutions. Let's work together to find them.

Our priority is ensuring that Vernon Park continues to be accessible and welcoming to its neighbors, no matter their income. We look forward to next steps.

— Friends of Vernon Park