

Oakland Development Activities Meeting

November 24, 2020, 6 pm

Hosted by OPDC on Zoom

Project: Carlow University Institutional Master Plan

Presenters: David Meadows, Shawn Nelson, Emily Gaspich, Sister Hellen Marie Burns, Anna Torrance

Carlow University presents updates on their Institutional Master Plan (IMP), specifically the demolition of St. Agnes Center. Starting July 1, canon law designated St. Agnes for profane but not sordid use. St. Agnes has not been a parish church for 23 years, and Carlow wishes to develop the land for academic use.

Carlow is conscious of development in relation to community, and has hosted public meetings since 2018. They plan to move to the planning commission phase in January 2021 and go to City Council in March 2021. Carlow is evaluating proposals for developer selection for P3 lower campus. The development team (developer, general contractor, architect) will have design and construction meetings beginning in 2021 and continuing into 2022 and 2023.

Community commitments: Carlow is committed to increasing educational opportunities through West Oakland via scholarships for campus school. They have committed to tuition waivers in the short term, and are developing endowed scholarships for West Oakland students K-8. Safe neighborhood and street initiatives continue with enforcement from Carlow Police. Carlow is promoting opportunities through their website for West Oakland community members to work at the university. P3 lower campus development and all major construction will contain minority, women, and disadvantaged business enterprise goals (align with MWDBE standards). Carlow will have job fairs to promote employment opportunities. Demolishing Perry funeral home within the next 12 months and creating a neighborhood playground for Carlow school and neighborhood children. Creating a wellness and resource center for first responders and community in lower campus development. Launching four graduate programs in P3 development. Plan to create a speech development disorder assessment and intervention plan and an occupational therapy resource plan which will be shared with the community. Carlow is making space in the new building on 5th Ave for community resources and Wi-Fi access to West Oakland. Carlow will sponsor adult literacy seminars.

In 2016 Carlow heard and responded to community concerns around Lot C development and St. Agnes School and Aquinas demolitions. They have made several strategic pivots in their IMP approach. Carlow will not develop Lot C in their 10-year plan and will not demolish St. Agnes School (which will house an early learning center/preschool program).

Alternatives for St. Agnes Center: Did an adaptive reuse study (2010) to see feasibility of adding extra floors to reactivate for university use. Concluded that possible reasons for repurposing St. Agnes could be satisfied by Carlow's existing structures. Completed a Facilities Condition assessment (2017) and Highest and Best Use Study (2019). Historic Review Commission Criteria does not apply to St. Agnes. Carlow has received no proposals to reuse the building as it.

Diocese and Vatican request that items of devotion (i.e. depictions of saints or holy family) not be used in secular spaces. For St. Agnes, crucifix, inside murals, and stain glass windows must be removed before being used in a secular setting.

Sister Hellen Marie (Sister of Mercy, member of Carlow Board of Trustees) speaks in support of Institutional Master Plan and the demolition of St. Agnes on behalf of the Sisters of Mercy. States best intentions to preserve items that can be removed.

Q: What about including a grocery store?

A: Our master plan does not include a grocery store.

Q: What is your percentage goal for hiring women and minority, disadvantaged employees?

A: Following county guidelines: 13% minority businesses, 2% women.

Q: Is there any legally binding document for Carlow's community commitments in the IMP? You haven't presented the entire IMP tonight. Can you point us to where the document lives?

A: We anticipated that St. Agnes center would be the real conversation piece this evening based on the IMP feedback on our website. We can come back again if you would like. The document is on our website.

Q: So there is no legally binding document for community benefit?

A: The IMP is the legally binding document, but we are open to other forms of commitment if anyone has ideas.

Q: What other outreach have you done in South Oakland, which is adjacent to your campus?

A: Our public meetings are open to everyone.

Q: St. Agnes builder and muralist have been recognized as historic – what feedback have you received against the demolition of St. Agnes?

A: We are aware of a petition with ~600 signatures. We received ~20 comments on the IMP form and a few phone calls in opposition. We acquired the property in the 90s and have tried to repurpose but ultimately decided that we need to demolish it to move forward.

Comment: St. Agnes was built to last for centuries, and is an important piece of Oakland's spiritual, cultural, and artistic history.

Response: This has not been a church since the University purchased the building in 1995. Carlow has made efforts to preserve it, and now our resources don't permit that. We are hoping to create and deepen the spiritual, cultural, and artistic heritage in the area.

Q: Will Carlow close down without this development? Will their future be unsustainable? Will you consider selling air rights?

A: We will not sell air rights. Higher education is pivoting. This is Carlow's way to be resilient as we lose more traditional students and make room for older adults in graduate level courses.

The lower campus development is the top priority for our institution – it is critically necessary for our survival.

Q: Have you considering developing the parking lot off Terrace St?

A: We have considered this, and our plan does not include development of that lot.

Q: Beyond adaptive reuse, what about incorporating St. Agnes into a new development?

A: We considered if there's a scenario where the façade can be kept, but we would have to remove items of devotion for any secular space and feel that in doing so the center itself would be diminished.

Comment: This building is not a church. It has not been a church since 1995. It has been "St. Agnes Center" since 1995. In the views of the Church it is no longer sacred; it is considered brick and mortar.

Q: Do you have a planning commission date yet?

A: No, we need to resubmit our final draft. We can come back in January and do a full-plan presentation at another Development Activities Meeting.