

Briefing Memo: Public Hearing for the PA Route 981 / Lincoln Avenue Corridor Overlay Zone



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Executive Summary

The proposed PA Route 981 / Lincoln Avenue Corridor Overlay District is designed as a transitional zone between single-family residential areas and high traffic corridors containing mixed uses. While the May 4th public hearing revealed significant resident anxiety, most concerns involve existing neighborhood issues that the City already has the authority to address through current codes. The corridor overlay district, working in unison with existing regulations, provides a framework to manage growth, remediate blight, and protect property values.

Resident Engagement During Public Hearing: Overview

Attendance: 10 residents representing approximately 7 neighborhood households attended.

Property Ownership: Notably, none of the attendees identified themselves as an owner of a parcel directly within the proposed overlay zoning district.

Sentiment: Residents expressed a deep "love for their neighborhood" but remained wary of change, specifically regarding business encroachment into residential structures.

Analysis of Resident Concerns

Resident feedback fell into two distinct categories:

1. Legacy Neighborhood Issues (Pre-existing)

These issues exist independently of the proposed overlay and fall under current enforcement:

Traffic & Parking: Increased volume on Lincoln & Raymond Avenues and employees of local businesses (e.g., Arthur Warner Co.) parking on residential streets.

Blight: Specifically, "junk and debris" and abandoned vehicles on properties along Route 981.

Low Income / Section 8 Rental Housing: Concerns regarding the maintenance of investment properties and supervision of low-income individuals & families using Section 8 rental assistance.

2. Concerns Specific to the Corridor Overlay District

Single-Family House Conversion: Fear that single-family homes will be converted into businesses increasing both customer and employee vehicle traffic and parking in the neighborhood.

Business Types: Anxiety over "predatory" businesses such as skill games, vape shops, or medical marijuana dispensaries.

Solutions & Mitigations Contained within Existing City Code

The Zoning & Code Enforcement Department has several tools to address these concerns while implementing the overlay:

Enforcement Authority: The City can regulate parking, eliminate blight, and dictate business types through its existing Zoning, Code Enforcement, and Police Departments.

Parking Solutions: Current code allows residents to request on-street permit parking.

Single-Family House Conversion Safeguards: State construction, ADA accessibility, and life-safety standards—combined with City on-site parking requirements—make the actual "conversion" of a house into a business financially challenging and limit the types of businesses that can realistically be viable.

Blight Remediation & Tenant Behavior: The City can implement a rental registration & inspection program to ensure investment properties are maintained, regardless of the tenant's income level and source of financial assistance.

Strategic Benefits of Adoption

The Corridor Overlay District is a strategic set of land use regulations to protect property values and neighborhood character. It expands the potential use of homes and businesses along Lincoln Avenue, ensuring that when owners are ready to sell, their properties are more versatile, more valuable, and fully compliant with the City's standards.

Conformity: Brings the non-conforming parcels with a commercial structure and business use into alignment with the rest of the PA Route 981 corridor.

Property Market Value: Protects the interests of current business owners in the R-2 zone, allowing them to sell or lease their properties for a business use type that is expanded beyond the current.

Controlled Growth: Dimensional standards ensure new construction match the existing neighborhood "built form," preserving character while allowing for walkable, low-impact commercial growth.

Conclusion for City Council

The burden of City Council is to evaluate how the existing code and the new corridor overlay zoning district work together to minimize perceived risks. While some issues (like general traffic flow or HUD-approved leasing) are outside the City's direct authority, the adoption of this district provides a proactive path toward neighborhood investment, business growth, new housing options, and blight elimination.