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10 must-read stories about the Queen Lane Apartments saga

Germantown still awaits word about whether the Queen Lane Apartments tower will be demolished or renovated. (NewsWorks, file art)

BY *AARON MOSELLE, @AWMOSELLE*

It's been more than two years since the Philadelphia Housing Authority first announced its plans to demolish Queen Lane Apartments in Germantown and replace it with a low-density development.

A mandatory historical review, which centers on a colonial burial ground — or Potter's Field — beneath the site, is nearly complete. But agency officials say construction is still a ways off.

The scenario puts the project at a crossroads of sorts.

With an eye on funding and its mission, PHA will make an important call next month: Move forward with demolition original or rehab the existing building.

Meeting this week

On Thursday, officials with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will meet with representatives from a collection of consulting parties to discuss the historic review, known as a Section 106 Agreement.

They'll specifically discuss what's known as a programmatic agreement, a legal document that maps out what actions will be taken going forward if any historic resources are found either during additional archeological digs, demolition or construction.

It's the largest remaining step before the Section 106 Agreement can be finalized, a requirement before HUD can give PHA the go ahead to prepare for demolition.

As that tipping point approaches, *NewsWorks* is providing a timeline of stories we've written.

This list covers the major twists and turns of this saga:

1. Queen Lane Apartments will come down soon, July 19, 2011 (/index.php/germantown-more-news/item/23318-queen-lane-appartments-will-come-down)

PHA officials meet with Germantown residents and present plans to demolish the outdated, 16-story building and replace it with 55 brand new rental units. The agency says the project as a better fit for the area, noting that the new development's design will "blend seamlessly into the fabric of the neighborhood."

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2. Residents prepare for demolition of Queen Lane Apartments, Oct. 24, 2011 (/index.php/local/germantown-feature/28743-queen-lane-apartment-demolition-discussion-continues)

PHA officials announce that demolition will begin in March 2012 and that construction will start a few months later in August. The news comes as tenants continue to evacuate the tower.

3. Debate continues over Queen Lane Apartments demolition, Dec. 19, 2011 (/index.php/just-you-wait/item/31502-queen-lane-towers-demolition)

Neighbors criticize the project for not having a home-ownership component and voice concerns about the loss of a longstanding, on-site playground. Residents also bring up a Potter's Field that sits beneath the site and ask if PHA can re-configure its design so that units aren't built within the boundaries of the African-American burial ground.

4. PHA revises development plans to honor historic Germantown burial ground, Jan. 6, 2012. (/index.php/local/germantown-feature/32303-pha-revises-development-plans-to-help-preserve-historic-germantown-burial-ground)

To the surprise and delight of many residents, PHA announces that it has altered its design to make the Potter's Field an open space. The project's 55-units will now ring the burial ground on three sides. Early discussions about a dedicated memorial also get underway.

5. Protecting a 'potter's field' is focal point of development project in Germantown, Jan 9, 2012 (/index.php/just-you-wait/item/32227-protecting-a-potters-field-has-become-the-focal-point-of-a-2012-pha-construction-project-in-germantown)

With the debate over the future of Queen Lane Apartments heating up, NewsWorks explores the history of the Potter's Field in Germantown as well as the term itself and the increasingly important role it's playing in PHA's plans.

6. Demolition D-Day passes and the Queen Lane Apartments still stand, Aug. 15, 2012 (/index.php/local/germantown-feature/42960-when-will-the-queen-lane-apartments-be-demolished)

With a mandated historical review of the site still underway, PHA delays demolition. It's still unclear how many graves, if any, from the Potter's Field sit beneath the site. An above-ground archaeological survey has found three anomalies that warrant a closer look.

7. PHA's Queen Lane Apartments plan gets city zoning-board approval, Nov. 27, 2012 (/index.php/local/germantown-feature/47531-phas-queen-lane-apartments-plan-gets-city-zoning-board-approval)

PHA's revised design plan gets zoning approval from the city. Demolition and construction, however,

are still not in sight. The definitive dimensions of the Potter's Field have yet to be determined. That question and others about the burial ground must be answered before HUD can give PHA the green light to move forward with demolition and construction.

8. PHA may 'cut our losses' and scrap Queen Lane Apartments demo plan, says agency official, Dec. 28, 2012 (/index.php/germantown-more-news/item/48929-pha-queen-lane-apartments-tower-might-not-be-demolished-after-all)

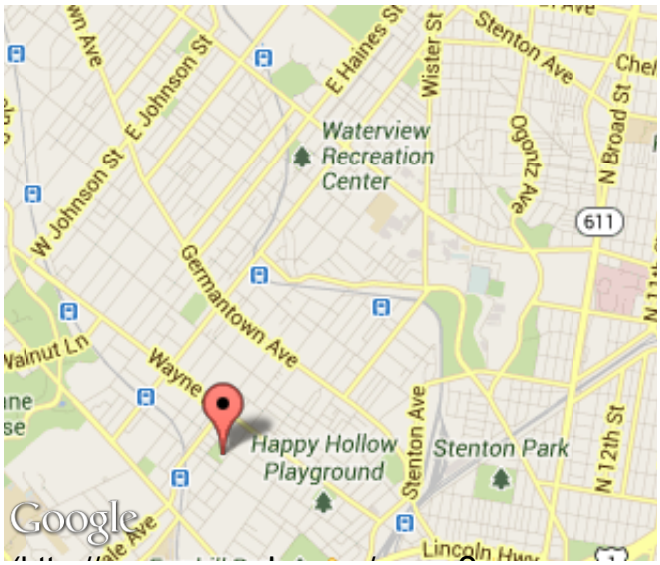
With the start of construction still not set, PHA officials tell residents that they may move to gut and rehab the existing building instead of moving forward with the new development. Neighbors gathered at the meeting are outraged. Officials note, among other things, the need to get people off the agency's long waiting list and into one of its units.

9. No human remains found at Potter's Field site, final PHA decision pending, March 20 (/index.php/local/item/52525-no-human-remains-found-at-potters-field-site)

The results of an archeological excavation of the site reveal that no human remains exist outside of the known boundaries of the Potter's Field. The discovery is welcome news to PHA. If the burial ground's footprint was larger than expected, the project may have been jeopardized.

10. PHA director: Queen Lane Apartments may not be torn down after all, Sept. 5 (/index.php/local/germantown-feature/59357-pha-director-queen-lane-apartments-may-not-be-torn-down-after-all)

Kelvin Jeremiah tells *NewsWorks* that the agency is now "seriously considering" scrapping its plans for the low-rise development. He says gutting and rehabbing the existing building would be the cheaper and faster way to get residents into units. He says a decision will be made one way or the other in October, when the agency is once again eligible to apply for much-needed tax credits.



A PHA shows potential renderings of development on the Potter's Field land at a December community meeting. (NewsWorks, file art)

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