

CHANGE AND LOOPS IN TIME



DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

By Barry Cassidy

As I finish up with my career I am being a little more selective concerning what I work on and try to stay closer to home. Personal circumstances have dictated that I work in Pittsburgh. My father was ill and being "himself" I was drafted to look after his final days. Living in Pittsburgh part time was a little bit different and I remembered why I left every morning when I awoke. So, I decided it would be good to center most of my work back in the Philadelphia area after he passed away and I settled the estate.

Trying to find a job in Philadelphia was not that much of a challenge, and I have decided to go back to work in Phoenixville for my good friend Manny DeMutis. I also am going to be helping my wife's Uncle Warren in Philadelphia. I look at these future endeavors as end of career moves. I am now 68 years old and my aim now is to make the world a better place.

My project in Philadelphia will be pretty straight forward. I am helping to create a community Development Corporation in the Brewerytown/Sharswood area to initiate an anti-gentrification program. I will also help them organize a corridor project on Ridge Avenue from Cecil B. Moore to Girard Avenue. The community group felt that they needed representation in dealing with the political entities, so they hired me. There are a lot of vacant lots, a lot of dumping as well as the full degree of aberrant behavior. It is a little different than Phoenixville, and more like when I had Kensington Avenue from Front Street to Lehigh. But really, when you look at it, a junkie is a junkie no matter where he is located, and the only difference for a "lady of the evening" is the location. I always thought that when eliminating prostitution, you should start with the daylight prostitution first.

In Phoenixville, it will be a little bit different, because I will be working for a developer and not in the public sector. I left there in 2012 after working for two years for Mr. DeMutis, getting the Phoenix Village Apartment complex through the planning process. That was after a successful seven-year run as the main street manager and head of the Main Street Community Development Corporation. I left the main street position after the Borough Council named an individual to my parking authority board who had as a political agenda to fight with me. I had already politically killed that guy once. I am not into shooting fish in a barrel and I always get my pizza in Downingtown.

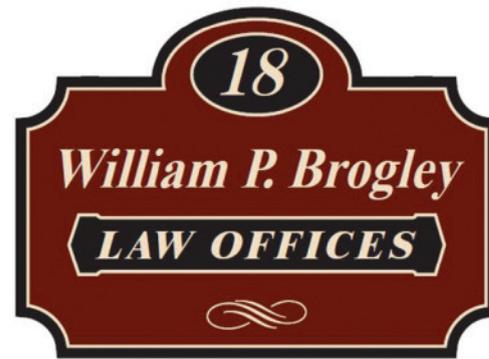


The politics have changed in Phoenixville, and I am comfortable working there again in the private sector. I met with Mr. DeMutis recently and he outlined some of the charges I will have in my new position. At the end of the conversation, he brought up the issue of train service to Phoenixville as part of my responsibility. If that is possible...and I have not kept up on the issues relating to that since I declared the "Greenline Dead" in a column for this publication sometime about a year or so ago. I know when I tried the first time, I could not get the backing of the Chester County Planning Commission and at the time, the Phoenixville's Borough Manager Jean Krack ranked the project second behind the Northern Relief route on the Borough of Phoenixville's priorities. So, we will have to see about that one... but... but... but I would love to do it... and by the same token, why try to do something that does not have political support on the borough level?

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It is the locals who have to want to do something for me to be effective. When you look at the North Philly project, I am being brought in by the community to create the Lower North Philadelphia Community Development Corporation, and the people will have a voice. I am not sure that there is support for a train line to Paoli from the people of Phoenixville. They may have the same priorities as before, with the all-important Northern Relief Route a #1, which would render another attempt at getting train service moot.

But what about Pittsburgh? What is to become of my Castle Shannon transit oriented development (TOD) project there, and my Beechview Federal Home Loan refugee housing project? Well I am happy to announce that I have hired Phoenixville native Ryan Norris to be my associate in Pittsburgh, keeping an eye on my TOD streetscape project while I monitor from afar and coordinate the grants. He will also implement a social media campaign with the merchants.

In my career, I have two unclosed loops, the Phoenixville Train Project and

the Westinghouse “Atom Smasher” project in Pittsburgh. Projects where I have been less than successful... alright a failure. I hate to lose, and I have to admit I become disappointed when I do not succeed. The Atom Smasher project was not only a failure but an embarrassment to me.

Although I was born in Pittsburgh and have many friends and family there, I am an outsider. When I went back to Pittsburgh to care for my father, my friend Gary Silversmith contacted me about working on the remediation of the Westinghouse site in Forest Hills PA. What attracted me to the project was the fact that I could do an historic restoration of the Atom Smasher (which is cool looking). To make a long story short, one weekend I went home to Philly and the demo contractor knocked down the Atom Smasher. The project quickly became a pariah and I quit the project upon hearing the news. For two and a half years, I have lived and worked 10 miles from it and could not bring myself to go there look at it.

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Then in September of this year, I was coming back from a meeting in Ebensburg after spending much of my September in London at the London School of Economics and Political Science. I was suffering from jet lag a little, and I missed my turn onto Route 119 which would take me to Route 70 and back to Castle Shannon. I knew if I kept going west sooner or later I would hit Pittsburgh. Then as I approached Pittsburgh I realized that I was close to Forrest Hills... I was drawn to the smasher.

When I got there, I saw it on the ground and became a little upset... at myself... at the situation... at life in general. I then reverted back to what my first wife called "Old Barry Syndrome" (OBS) and I stopped by the "Tug Boat," a bar across from the Atom Smasher site. When I walked in the owner Jerry greeted my attendance by announcing to the bar I was in the house (in a good way). I needed a shot of tequila (I asked for a shot of rot gut tequila, the OBS drink of choice). As I quaffed down the shot I heard a voice from the bar... "I'll buy that shot." I looked down the bar to see a gentleman sitting there I did not recognize. He told

me he wanted to buy the atom smasher site but Gary Silversmith would not get back with him. He was upset because he wanted to do the right thing, and he could not make it work through a lack of information. I looked him in the eye, and he and told him if he wanted to do it, I would put a million dollars on the table to help him out as long as he could come up with a 25% match up, and headed to the door. I did not need another shot because I had jet lag and already missed my turn, and after all, I am now "new Barry."

Lo and behold, the next day he called me, we set up a meeting with Gary and looks like we have a deal. One of the things no one realized when they knocked the atom smasher off its perch is that it weighs too much and is too big to move through the streets, so I may get my wish to restore it again. I can close this loop.

So, at 68 years of age, a white haired cranky old man, on social security with a planters' wart on his back, I will attempt to address the only two failures in my career. This last-ditch effort could close some loops in my career now, because who knows what tomorrow brings.