

Thoughts on the Proposed Green Roof

I would like to take this opportunity to address one minor but revealing issue regarding the proposed Septa parking garage. It has been mentioned several times that Septa might be willing to add a “green roof” to the top of the structure. This is essentially a roof garden or mini-park. But a close examination will show that “green roof” is just an eco-friendly buzz word that is being offered to try to reduce the opposition of environmentally-concerned residents.

Septa is not going to add a green roof to the garage, for a very good reason. It makes no sense, either for them or for us.

1. As a Septa representative noted in passing at the meeting with Cliff Terrace residents, a green roof would require adding an additional level above the 5th parking level. That is, an additional 10 feet or so added to the already monstrous height of roughly 60 feet. This alone would be an unacceptable trade-off for most residents.
2. At that height, it would be invisible. The houses on Cliff terrace have their 3rd floor (in many cases, unused attics) at a height of 20 feet. Rooftops are at about 29 feet. Therefore, the present planned structure will be about twice as high as our houses; to catch a glimpse of grass on the rooftop would require standing atop a 40- foot ladder at the highest point of our roofs. This would be far above the height of even the proposed taller Greenwood Ave. bridge.
3. This cannot be a light, airy structure, either. Wet snow weighs about 50 lbs per cubic foot. This would be an added load of approximately 5,000 tons (yes, tons) to the structure with only a 3-foot snowfall followed by a half-day of light drizzle. This will not only require a green roof level at least as strong as the parking levels, it means that every supporting structure beneath it has to be built that much wider and stronger to hold the added weight. This will obviously add at least 20% to the cost, and perhaps substantially more. At a rough estimate of \$40,000,000 for the proposed structure itself, that would be at least \$8,000,000 extra. Does anyone seriously think that Septa would spend that kind of money to make Cheltenham environmentalists happy? Would the Township? Would you?
4. The principal advantage of a green roof is that it is usually a big energy-saver. A layer of vegetation topped by snow makes for excellent insulation in the winter. In the summer, the growing plants transpire, or slowly release water to the atmosphere, which keeps the rooftop cool and reduces air-conditioning costs. This is utterly pointless on a parking garage, which will be open to the ambient air on the level below.
5. Septa cannot be bothered to pick up cigarette butts or plant grass around their present parking garages, which are on view to hundreds of their own customers a day. The idea that they would maintain an out-of-the-way garden plot not likely to be visited by more than a handful of people in a week is ludicrous.

6. A rooftop garden makes a lot of sense in the middle of the city. But Cheltenham already has nearly 500 acres of park land. Who would go to the trouble of driving to the top of a parking structure, parking, getting out, and climbing to the roof, where they will be virtually invisible to others, yet have a 360-degree view of their surroundings? This is not a rhetorical question. Who **would** be delighted to have such an isolated garden spot?

I urge everyone to pay attention to **all** the details of Septa's plans, as I have to this, and not to be swayed by impractical possibilities or vague promises. I suspect that if the same careful attention is paid to other aspects of their plans, many more of them will prove to be just as phony.

Thank you for your attention.
Allan Lundy, Cliff Terrace resident