

Olive branch Jefferson should accept offer of planning help.

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Frequently, the role of citizens in Philadelphia gets limited to shouting No! to plans cooked up out of public view. And sometimes that nay-saying is necessary, as in the case of a misguided plan to build an eight-story parking garage on Chestnut Street near Thomas Jefferson University.

The garage, which requires seven zoning variances, is headed for a third day of zoning hearings.

At a hearing Wednesday, a parade of activists, architects and residents blasted the plan. With good reason.

Garages deaden the streetscape anywhere they sit. Putting a huge one on one of the main east-west arteries of Center City would be the kind of poor planning that threatens to undermine Philadelphia's appeal as America's most walkable downtown.

Fortunately, the Design Advocacy Group (DAG), an activist alliance of architects led by founders William Becker and Alan Greenberger, wants to do more than just shout no.

DAG has volunteered its expertise to help sketch out an alternative solution, a different plan for using the blocks in play around Jefferson to give the university what it wants: new medical research and ambulatory surgery buildings, adequate parking, and a more vibrant retail scene.

The Street administration, which has been passive as Jefferson struggles to balance its needs with the city's, should encourage the university to accept this citizen gift.

And it should work to help Jefferson and its partners in this project defray any costs arising from a better plan. That's preferable to an endless, counterproductive zoning spat.