

Is the proposed 14-18 W. 3rd. St. a good addition to our community? Part 2

The Bethlehem Gadfly [14-18 W. 3rd. St.](#), [Development](#), [Southside](#) March 9, 2021

🌀 Latest in a series of posts on 14-18 W. 3rd. St. 🌀

Historic Conservation Commission meeting Monday, March 15, 2021, 6PM

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ref: [Another opportunity to apply the “Smith Principles”](#)
ref: [Is the proposed 14-18 W. 3rd. St. a good addition to our community? Part 1](#)

continued . . .

6) Support projects that incorporate green space and/or the development of public spaces into their design

I am a bit confused by the early renderings of this project, and I hope that additional clarification is offered by the developer’s presentation. The project extends along the South Bethlehem Greenway’s final yards, and the renderings seem to show a potential integration of a seating area for a small business on the Greenway. If the developer plans to finish this section of the Greenway as a part of their project, I think that would be fantastic. We’ve been waiting on this final section of the Greenway for too long, and, unfortunately, no requirements to finish the Greenway seem to have been included in Dennis Benner’s approval for the adjacent building.



spillman

Street View - Greenway

However, another one of the renderings seems to show a small sliver of Greenway as a walkway between the building and a parking lot. I hope that this is not the plan, since it would likely prevent the public from using this piece of the Greenway if it is perceived to be a private walkway for residents of the building to get to their cars.

How does the developer plan to integrate the Greenway into their development? I look forward to hearing more.

7) Support projects that are developed in response to community needs identified by residents and stakeholders, and that engage residents and stakeholders in idea development and the design process

I'm not sure that anyone thinks we need substantially *more* student housing on the Southside. I'm not sure that we need any more large commercial spaces that are not built out and are unaffordable for most local, small businesses. I suppose that this project would place more students in the downtown area, but I'm not sure if they will really spend much more money at local businesses. My conversations with students and surveys conducted over the years indicate that there is a small range of small business types that truly benefit from student presence in their neighborhoods—mostly restaurants, bars, and cafes, with an occasional targeted hair or nail salon, laundromat, barber shop, gym, or fitness studio. Yes, we have a lot of these on the Southside, but will moving students onto Third Street make a difference in their business? I'm curious to see. I would be more likely to support one- and two-bedroom apartments targeted at a broader population than undergraduates in this location, since I think it would have more of an impact on the local business community.

Like most development projects in our community, I doubt that the developer will consult with community members to see what residents would like to see in this location. They might do focus groups with students to see what types of businesses they would like to see on the first floor, but I will continue to emphasize that responsible development should take into consideration the ideas and perspectives of the people that live in a community.

8) Support projects that prioritize sustainable development practices and take proactive approaches to addressing challenges presented by our changing climate. Examples: The Flatiron Building

Thus far, this project does not address this point. I hope that the developer's presentation will include an analysis of the environmental impact of the project.

9) Avoid projects that cause displacement of long-time residents, low-income residents, and locally-owned businesses

No businesses or residents will be displaced through this project, so that is definitely a plus.

10) Do not use projects that are nearly universally considered planning and design failures as precedent for elements of new development (e.g., Urban Renewal projects like Rooney building, Litzenberger House, Lehigh's Brodhead House, Rite Aid shopping center)

While this project seems to be designed to avoid the pitfalls of the Southside's ugliest developments (street-facing parking lots, massive towers, character-less architecture), it does use a controversial, non-historic property as precedent for height. I suspect that the HCC will address this at their meeting, and I look forward to hearing their analysis.

All in all, this isn't a bad project, but it's not a very exciting one either. I still have a lot of questions, and parking is a big one. If these are mostly students, hopefully there won't be too many cars involved. I know that some could be parked in the garage next door, and others in the Mechanic Street lots, as the developer of the last project to come before the HCC had mentioned (but what if that project had been approved?). One image suggests that the developer is planning on building a lot behind the building, which would be unfortunate for the extension of the Greenway.

With the help of the HCC, the Planning Commission, and some resident voices, I think there's potential to turn this into a project that truly adds to our neighborhood. Maybe reduce the height a bit, secure some first-floor tenants, commit to finishing up the Greenway and integrating it into the building plans, and think about whether undergraduate student housing is truly the best use for a building in this location. Maybe even make it a green building! What do you think?

Anna

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