

Testing the principles for responsible development on the S. New St. project, part 2

The Bethlehem Gadfly 319-327 S. New, Development, Southside March 1, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts on 319-327 S. New St.* 

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ref: [Establishing Community-Centered Principles for Responsible Southside Development](#)

ref: [Testing the principles for responsible development on the S. New St. project, part 1](#)

continued . . .

5) Support adaptive reuse of historic buildings

According to the HCC, only one property slated for demolition on this project has relevant historic value, and the developer has incorporated its façade into their design. Adaptive reuse seems to be off the table for this project (and debatably not an option), but, of course, there's always the possibility of looking elsewhere for a historic property to rehab.

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

It's clear that the developers of this project were told by City staff that they need to think creatively about the adjacent South Bethlehem Greenway. The developer has repeatedly assured the HCC that they will work to "activate the Greenway" through events or contributions of some sort to its livelihood, although the details have not been made clear. Despite these assurances, I'm interested in exploring the impact of a massive, looming structure that will be built nearly on top of the Greenway. Will this be a good addition? The Greenway will certainly be a fantastic asset for the residents of this building, but I'm not so sure about the impact of this new building on the users of the Greenway.

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 sure that there are business owners who are excited about this project. 82 apartments-worth of residents living in the middle of the business district! I get the appeal to local businesses who envision hosts of new regular customers. However, luxury apartments have not been among the "needs" or even "wants" that residents have identified throughout recent community visioning processes. Affordable housing, youth-serving organizations, and "everyday" retail and service businesses usually come out on top. Restaurants are also popular, so the food court would undoubtedly have fans among some residents. I'd like to see the developers engage the community in the development process. Although this seems like a long-shot for this particular project, I don't think it's an unreasonable expectation of developers—at least the kind of developers that will build what's most wanted in our neighborhoods.

8) Support projects that prioritize sustainable development practices and take proactive approaches to addressing challenges presented by our changing climate

Based on the developer's initial presentation, I am not aware of any attempts to prioritize sustainable practices or address the climate impact of their project.

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

I discussed the potential displacement in earlier responses, but, as a reminder, this project stands to displace three small businesses and an unknown number of residents. Tenants of the apartments at 325 S. New Street were evicted three years ago when the developer's business partner acquired the property. Ideally, a proposal like this would take advantage of vacant land to build, rather than displacing existing businesses and residents.

10) Do not use projects that are nearly universally considered planning and design failures as precedent for elements of new development

Yes, there are massive apartment buildings in south Bethlehem. The Rooney Building, Litzenberger House, and Broadhead House at Lehigh were all constructed during the Urban Renewal period and would never be approved today due to their design. Since then, urban planners have shifted to recognize the value of place-making and the importance of historic conservation, and I would hope that this developer sticks with contemporary research when modifying their project, rather than depend on obsolete examples.