

Council speaks on the Garrison rezoning

The Bethlehem Gadfly 11 and 15 West Garrison St., Neighborhoods, Northside, Serious Issues
October 10, 2019

(12th in a series of posts about 11 and 15 W. Garrison St.)



Douglas Graves, "Zoning map remains same." Bethlehem Press, October 9, 2019.

Nicole Radzievich, "Bethlehem scuttles rezoning proposal after hearing impassioned pleas from Garrison Street residents." Morning Call, October 3, 2019.

Sara Satullo, "These Bethlehem residents fought to save their vibrant city block . . . and won." lehighvalleylive.com, October 2, 2019.



Connell photo Douglas Graves

[October 1 City Council meeting video](#)

minutes 22-1:08:00

Followers will know that the petitioner sought approval to rezone 11 and 15 W. Garrison as part of a mixed-use residential and retail development to encompass the entire 700 block of N. New St.



The vote-taking here at the October 1 Council meeting was pretty dramatic. Gadfly has presented this part of the meeting below in the order in which it occurred. Note that there were three straight “no’s” followed by three straight “yes’s” — so Councilman Reynolds cast the breath-taking final “no” vote after seeming to lean the other way.

Remember that part of Gadfly’s mission is to help us know our elected officials better, so that when it comes time to vote, we are making informed choices. Probably all of current Council will be running again, and it would surprise no one if one or two (or three) current members run for Mayor in two years. Take the opportunity to hear them and how they think.



No: Olga Negrón (video min. 1:12:18)

AUDIO RECORDINGS UNAVAILABLE IN THIS ARCHIVE

- [It was] very refreshing to hear from the requestor that he wanted to hear from you.”
- “What is best for Garrison St. is not to be rezoned.”
- “The side of the building on New St. . . . could be commercial as everything else down there is commercial. But Garrison St. . . should stay residential.”



No: Grace Crampsie Smith (video min. 1:13:31)

- “One concern . . . I think parking is an issue.”
- “Two driveways entering into the building . . . I think that poses a real safety issue.”
- “Mr. Connell mentioned that the City has been recently issuing more building permits for apartments than homes and that’s the direction of the City, I I have to say . . . that direction is not where the City needs to go.”
- “We need to really enhance our neighborhoods, our communities.”
- “We have to get away from just expanding into apartment bases and look at building more single-family homes.”
- “I think that our City was built on the backbone of working men and women who wanted one thing and that was a home and a safe neighborhood for their families, and I think we as a City need to really support and enhance that.”
- “I think that the reason our great City feels more like a small town is because of our neighborhoods.”



No: Paige Van Wirt (video min. 1:15:30)

- “I was so impressed by the community that came out tonight . . . It is exactly what we are striving for.”
- “I cannot imagine us doing anything that would harm that dynamic, gouging into your neighborhood.”
- “I have not been convinced that he cannot build this building without changing the zoning.”
- “I think you should be so proud of what you have.”



Yes: Adam Waldron (video min. 1:16:27)

- “This is a tricky situation where you have a vibrant, healthy neighborhood . . . On the flip side we also don’t see a developer who seems as receptive as the one who comes before us to feedback from people in that community.”
- “Often there is a kind of blank, nameless face, a name where we don’t see the person who has spent years living in this community . . . and plans to live in the community after the development as well.”
- This is a unique position for us where we have a lot of very genuine people coming to us and asking for very different things.”
- “From what I’ve seen, I think the plan presented to us is a positive one.”

- “I think there could be some growing pains. I also think Mr. Connell is receptive to the idea of continuing a dialogue and working through some of the issues.”
- “This could be a net positive for the neighborhood by bringing in some fresh new families, new potential friends and neighbors to your community.”



Yes: Bryan Callahan (video min. 1:19:44)

- “You’re not going to like what I’m going to say, but I want to lay out the truth first.”
- “We can’t stop him from doing that development.”
- “He doesn’t have to come back to the City to knock those two buildings down.”
- “We have a lot of developers who do not take into consideration neighbors, and it seems like Mr. Connell has tried hard to do that.”
- “A lot of people have verified that he is a very good landlord.”
- “My concern is this . . . he has the ability to knock those two houses down . . . could put a flat lot there . . . could put garbage dumpsters there . . . could put a buffer there . . . could do a cantilever project.”
- “My preference is that he work with all of you.
- “Don’t shoot me. [Gadfly loves this!] I’m going to vote for this tonight . . . That doesn’t mean I’m voting for it two weeks from now.”
- [Volunteers to meet with residents and walk around the neighborhood.]

- “I would prefer that we work with him on a plan that all of you would like.”
- “I know it’s not that you want to hear.”



Yes: Michael Colon (video min. 1:27:07)

- “I’m not going to speculate on a lot of what if, what could be.”
- “Full transparency. My brother lives in your neighborhood.”
- “A lot of times when we are making these decisions it is not a matter of all eggs in one basket or the other.”
- “Taking all things into account . . . I think this project . . . will be a net positive with some disruptions.”
- “I also fully believe that Mr. Connell will stand behind his comments . . . [not] making a liar out of a few us . . . we believe he has every intent to work with the neighbors.”
- “Never do we make everybody happy.
- “And really what his background and history are in connection to this neighborhood, to his tenants, I’m going to support this project.”



No: J. William Reynolds (video min. 1:29:21)

- “This is not the end of the conversation. Yes or No tonight is not the end of this conversation.”
- “Whatever happens here tonight, it’s still going to require the cooperation of the neighbors, of Mr. Connell, of the City Planning Commission, of the City Administration.”
- “A lot of the issues tonight that came up are issues that I don’t believe fit exactly into a zoning conversation.”
- “Those questions . . . should not go into conversations about . . . zoning.”
- “You hear a lot of different things that people want from those neighborhoods . . . those business on Broad St., they want more people, and they want more people living downtown, and when you look at kind of why we struggle there along Broad Street, a lot of it comes down to the fact that we don’t have more people.”
- “Whether or not two parcels here get rezoned or not, I think it’s safe to say that in some way, we are going to get more people here on this lot.”
- “And we do need commercial development, and I always bristle when somebody uses that word ‘commercial intrusion’ . . . we want those mixed uses.”
- “With that being said, I do realize that there is a spirit here of what people want . . . It’s a spirit you don’t find everywhere in these neighborhoods.”
- “I’m not convinced here that there is not a project that is not going to help out the Northside, that’s going to help out Broad Street, that’s going to help out the neighborhood that doesn’t necessarily include these two properties.”
- “There are a lot of options here that don’t require different zoning.”
- “It’s also entirely possible that Mr. Connell can build a building here that doesn’t include these two properties that people are not going to like either.”

- “With that being said, I’m not convinced that he needs these two houses to be rezoned.”

Where did you stand? How did your views compare to our Councilpersons?

Lots interesting to chew on here.

Next time . . .

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October 4-13