

“Something about this just does not feel right” (52)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Parking, Serious Issues October 24, 2018

(52nd in a series of posts on parking)

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Dear Gadfly,

I have found this entire situation with the BPA and the proposed Polk/East 3rd Street garage very bothersome throughout this process. Why? Because I don't believe some public officials have operated entirely above board with the public. Now, I understand that the purchase of the subject site has been negotiated with the Sands in the amount of \$2.1 million.

Was there a better deal out there for property in this vicinity? Perhaps, but now we may never know.

In October 2017 an owner of nearby property informed me that they were willing to consider selling a parcel to the BPA for development of this garage. At the time there was mention of the BPA taking the lot on East 3rd Street via eminent domain, a process and cost that could have become exorbitantly expensive considering that the owner of the Sands, who had majority control of this parcel, has some of the deepest pockets in the world.

This property owner informed me that they had already discussed this with one public official, but, knowing who that official was, I expressed concern that the message would ever be delivered to those who should know. So, with the property owner's permission I contacted a second public official on October 26, 2017. I was informed by this second public official that this was the first time that this information had been provided, thereby confirming my earlier concern.

I provided the landowner's contact information to the second public official so that conversations could be had about this option.

The owner of this second location has told me that they have never heard back from the City or BPA. Would there have been any acquisition

savings? I don't know, but the fact that an alternative was available and never followed up on raises serious questions in my opinion about the behind-the-scenes deal-making, lack of an overall strategy to address public parking in this area, and a complete and utter lack of flexibility in approaching these issues.

I firmly believe at this point that Council should think very seriously about whether they should be supporting fine increases at this time, until a full vetting of all information is made in a public forum, and until the relationship between meter rate increases and parking fines can be better defined for Council and the public in terms of the BPA's longer-term planning for building garages. This authority doesn't seem to be able to think outside the box and thus reverts to the same old practices and strategies that have put them exactly where they are today.

Something about this just does not feel right, and without going into actual accusations, sometimes I wonder whether there may be some conflicts of interest in the way the BPA's business is being conducted relative to this proposed garage at Polk and East 3rd Street.

Dana