

Communicating with the communities

The Bethlehem Gadfly Lehigh University, Southside March 1, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts about Lehigh University and the Southside 

Here's Lehigh announcing the temporary closing of Packer Ave to the Lehigh community. Feels a bit strange to Gadfly that no mechanism is identified for Lehigh community members to register thoughts on a permanent closing. Feels a bit strange that nothing was addressed to the people who park there. The photos in the previous post were taken c. 4PM Saturday afternoon, and Packer was parked up the whole length on both sides. Maybe something was going on, but it didn't look like it. The campus felt deserted. Where are those cars going? — I guess the study will tell us.

But this is Lehigh announcing the closing to the Lehigh community. There was some skepticism about how and how vigorously the surrounding neighborhood community was advised of the January 23 "community" meeting at Broughal. Lehigh kinda skipped over a question about that. Should Lehigh be addressing a statement like this to that other community? Or is that the City's responsibility?

Followers will recognize that Gadfly is more and more taken by Lehigh's reason #3. Can you imagine Lehigh writing to the neighborhood community directly and saying, "We recognize there are long-standing cultural issues that can make our campus feel inaccessible to you, and we are trying ease those issues by_____."

Wow, that would be neat (does anybody say "cool" any more?).

Does the neighborhood community have any idea of reason #3?

Isn't one of the long-standing issues poor communication?

February 20

Dear Members of the Campus Community,

Earlier this week, the Bethlehem City Council approved the temporary closure of Packer Avenue from Vine Street to Webster Street, beginning March 9 and continuing through April 30, 2020. No vehicles or parking will be permitted during this time. Pedestrian traffic will be allowed and encouraged.

This test closure will allow the university, the City, and our partners in the community to gauge the long-term feasibility of a permanent closure of that portion of the street. At this point, no decisions have been made by either the university or the city regarding a permanent closure. We will conduct independent studies of vehicle traffic and pedestrian usage to assess the impact on neighboring streets and the surrounding neighborhoods. We will also assess the impact on Broughal Middle School.

More than 1,200 pedestrians cross the affected portion of Packer Avenue each day. We are proposing the test closure for three reasons: 1) to enhance the safety for our community and the pedestrians that cross primarily at University Walk; 2) to knit together the Lehigh campus, which this street bisects, and strengthen the connections to the South Bethlehem business district; and 3) to create an attractive pedestrian walkway for both the Lehigh community and the Bethlehem community. We recognize there are long-standing cultural issues that can make our campus feel inaccessible to the Bethlehem community and we hope this closure might address that by creating an amenity that serves both Lehigh and SouthSide Bethlehem.

We are committed to working together with our campus community, the City, the Bethlehem Area School District, and other community partners to ensure that any and all concerns about the closure are heard and addressed.

During the trial period, Packer Avenue will remain open for emergency access, and studies will be conducted to assess the impact of the closure on traffic flow, parking, and safety. The results of the studies will be made available to the public.

More details will be forthcoming on the closure in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

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