

Planning Commission favors 3rd and Polk, but parking needs to be settled

The Bethlehem Gadfly [404 E. 3rd St.](#) April 10, 2021

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“I believe this project is one that is going to be done right. I think it is a much needed project. I think it will complement everything that is going on in the Southside.”

Planning Commission chair

“I am very bullish on Polk Street.”

Mayor Donchez

ref: **Smith puts eyes on the plans for 3rd and Polk**

The Planning Commission gave the go-ahead for this project for a new building at 403 E. 3rd St. (across Polk St. from Mo;inari’s) in its April 8 meeting. with the chair almost gushing with his affirmation. There was, however. considerable grousing about the stalled Polk Street Garage project across the street that would provide so much necessary parking.

Gadfly will post some audio and commentary from the meeting shortly.

selections from [Sara K. Satullo](#), *“80 apartments and 2 restaurants planned for 7-story South Bethlehem building.”* [lehighvalleylive.com.](#), April 9, 2021.

Ashley Development Corp. plans to build a 7-story mixed use development at Third and Polk streets. Plans call for two floors of retail and then a mix of 80 studio, one-bedroom and two-bedroom apartments on the upper floors built on a parking lot at 404 E. Third Street. The property sits between Third and Mechanic streets and bounded by Polk Street to the west.



Ashley recently had great success converting office space in an adjacent building at 322 E. Third St. into 52 high-end apartments targeting Lehigh University students and young professionals, Pektor said. “We are really trying to push the market to a high-end, higher quality product,” Pektor said. “We’ve learned that students, graduate students and staff people will pay for high-quality units and they will pay to be close to convenience... The more foot traffic and more residential units we can put in that approximate area I think is good for everyone.”

Pektor wants to capitalize on his success with a mixed-use development of more housing next door. He’s also in negotiations with two high-end, local restaurateurs who would occupy the first and second floors, he said. The more students developers can draw down to the business district the more the city can preserve the integrity of its original neighborhoods and create a more vibrant commercial district, Pektor said. And it creates a boon of foot traffic for local businesses, he said.



The planning commission ultimately signed off on several variances it has the power to approve under city zoning and made them contingent on developers nailing down where tenants will park. The biggest

unknown for the project — estimated at a \$16 million to \$18 million investment — is where its residents and visitors will park. The coronavirus pandemic and unexpected emergency repairs at the Walnut Street parking garage have derailed plans for the Polk Street parking deck across from Pektor’s project. He is prepared to lease 114 spaces in the Bethlehem Parking Authority deck if it is built. Without it, he might require tenants to provide proof of parking elsewhere or have to redesign the project, Pektor said.

Bethlehem Mayor Bob Donchez on Friday [said] much hinges on the forthcoming Walnut Street garage condition report and clearer federal guidelines on how the stimulus funding can be used. “Polk Street is basically shovel ready and now we have more (lease) commitments today than we had for the garage a year ago,” Donchez said. “That puts the parking authority in a stronger position. The key is what does the Walnut

Street report say and what are the guidelines and regulations for how we should use the stimulus money? I am very bullish on Polk Street.”

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