

The developer plays hard ball

The Bethlehem Gadfly 319-327 S. New, Development, Southside February 24, 2021

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

ref: **Another developer thinking big . . . er, tall**

ref: **The HCC discusses the proposal for 319-327 S. New**

ref: **“The current proposal for a 12-story structure is inappropriate”**

ref: **“What we have in front of us is going to be a big stretch for us”**

ref: **“Going to 5-6 stories definitely wouldn’t work”**

ref: **Southside developer blows some smoke**



*Proposed streetscape February 15 — HCC meeting February 22
showing Rooney Building****

Historical Conservation Commission meeting on proposed new construction on South New St. February 22, 2021: chapter 2.

Gadfly has said that the developer blew some smoke.

No malice intended. That’s what developers do. Just part of the dance.

But we expect our volunteer representatives to be street smart.

Listen in now as the Commission members engage with the developer during this second visit on the project.

Audio Player not available in this archive

Frankly, Gadfly feels a bit tentative about new HCC chair Gary Lader. Chair Lader felt at times a little too willing to compromise on the height guidelines for Gadfly's liking. For instance, he suggested that the developer include the Zest building (306 S. New) as a point of reference and said that "we" were "hoping" the developer would come back with a proposal in the 8-story range. Maybe Gadfly is not being fair saying so. Maybe in his role as facilitating chair, Lader feels he needs to keep the conversation going with the developer on amicable terms, keep him hooked, as it were. But there's a time or two in the meeting when Commission members speak back rather strongly to their chair. For instance, when chair Lader talks about the 8-story "building across the street" as point of reference for a "compromise," he is immediately and rather dramatically met with a chorus of "Hold ons" from his committee, reminding him that the Zest building is 6-stories, was itself an exception to HCC guidelines, and is not considered a contributing factor to this proposal. "Right, ok," he replies. As if awakened.

In any event, Commission members responded firmly to the developer. This "isn't close to what I suggested," says Seth Cornish. "I'm afraid I find it somewhat discouraging that it comes back one story taller," says Beth Starbuck.

In response to a direct question about the new 13-story design from Commissioner Starbuck, the developer explains that it was added ("in haste" — an excuse? — since they had to submit new plans for this meeting) because of an adjustment made necessary to keep the facade on 321-323 that the HCC requested last meeting and that some details in the design would be "rectified" later.

Felt like more smoke to the Gadfly.

And for the second time Commissioner Cornish pointed out that "we're avoiding the elephant in the room."

Now it becomes really interesting. You have to listen to this.

The point in the dance when the developer plays hard ball.

Listen in.

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We will continue to do our “homework” on such things as the size of the building (implying a belief that a size above HCC guidelines is negotiable), says the developer, but if the HCC doesn’t give approval now to demolish the building, “then the project goes away today.”

The project goes away today.

Badda-boom!

Do you have a “comfort level” to cut the size of the building in half, asks chair Lader pointedly? “Not yet” is the reply. But “we want you to vote tonight” on the demolition.

Watch what you ask for is always good advice.

At which time chair Lader turns to comment from the public, of whom there were a healthy 30 or so Zoomed in.

**** Even Gadfly knows the Rooney Building is grandfathered in and should not be part of the discussion. Including it is more smoke from the developer.*

to be continued . . .