

## **Attack on councilperson damages credibility (13)**

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Serious Issues, Walkability and Bikeability March 13, 2019  
*(13th in a series of posts on Walkability and Bikeability)*

*Steve Melnick has had a career in economic development for over 35 years in several states, with the last 20 years here in Bethlehem and the Lehigh Valley.*

Gadfly:

Several points of debate have been raised recently that speak to the walkability issue in Bethlehem. Unfortunately when they are used to denigrate the opinion of a current city council person, they lose much of their credibility.

The points raised by Professor Thode may, in certain cases, be valid. However, Bethlehem is a unique community, and his advocacy of high rise development in our two urban cores is nothing more than a thinly disguised attempt to justify the fact that our leaders have allowed or, in certain cases, been forced into allowing developers to build what they want, where they want, with little or no accountability for our existing zoning and planning regulations.

Why do we have historic districts, conservation overlays and other zoning and planning regulations if we continue to ignore them? By the way, what defines our urban cores? Where do they begin or end? Is Stefko Boulevard in the urban core? Is the Lehigh campus part of the urban core? Experts usually avoid ambiguous terminology because it can skew perceptions.

Walkability is more than having access to supermarkets and medical facilities. It is true that the North side urban core has low density population. I view that as a positive attribute. Other communities that have allowed the subdivision of grand old homes and buildings into a myriad of apartments have seen the disastrous results of those actions.

Allentown, our neighbor to the west, has seen numerous high rise developments built in the last few years. Ironically, this increased density and alleged criterion for walkability according to Dr. Thode has resulted in not a single supermarket being located inside the urban core. Indeed, the Giant supermarket and Wegmans are 4 and 5 miles away from center square respectively.

I guess in that category we, as residents, have to make a judgment. Do we want crowded residential development to justify a supermarket on the north side, or are we willing to drive to one outside of the urban core and preserve the architectural beauty of our historic district?

Demographically urban core supermarkets market to the residents that surround their site. The C Town market on the Southside is the perfect example. Its product mix and pricing reflects the neighborhood it serves. I believe this debunks the low population density argument for the southside.

By attacking a current council person for advocating for sound urban planning, Dr. Thode has completely revealed his bias. Currently developers in Bethlehem have been allowed to build what they want, where they want with no thought to the existing zoning and planning regulations. Could Dr. Thode have an ulterior motive for attacking a candidate using the cover of academic expertise? Food for thought.

- Steve