

# Martin Tower: the EAC wanted “a showpiece of sustainable design” (17)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Climate Action Plan, Environment, Environmental Advisory Council, Gadfly's posts, Martin Tower, Serious Issues April 19, 2019

*(17th in a series on Martin Tower)*

*Martin Tower demolition May 19*

[www.martintowerbethlehem.com](http://www.martintowerbethlehem.com)

Gadfly would like to stay on the Martin Tower beat a little longer. Lots of good stuff here.

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Let's back up a moment.

Gadfly caught the “City bug” in January 2018 and started going to meetings, not only the Council meetings but many of the citizen-based committees and commissions that most of us, frankly, don't know much about.

Take a look at the list of the [City Authorities, Boards, and Commissions](#). Quite extensive, no? Lots of residents volunteering their services.

He found that one of the most impressive and enjoyable groups is the [Environmental Advisory Council \(EAC\)](#) chaired by Lynn Rothman, with members Elizabeth Behrend, Elisabeth Cichonski, (ubiquitous) Kathy Fox, Brian Hillard, and Mike Topping — in addition to a cluster of regular attendees known for their environmental knowledge and activism and Councilman Reynolds often present as well.

Think EAC and think CAP and PBO. That's Climate Action Plan and the Plastic Bag Ordinance. Not only nice people but productive people. So the EAC has weighed in significantly on Martin Tower, both past and present, and Gadfly would like to highlight their “public sapience” — the nerdy term you saw him coin recently and which he must use a few times to wash it out of his system!

In a phrase designed to make Gadfly's palms sweat, blood race, breath heave, and loins leap, the EAC dreamed of the Martin Tower site as “a showpiece of sustainable design”!

As a prime location for a landmark redevelopment, this site could showcase cutting-edge green design, respect open space and utilize smart growth principles. Such a design could encompass transit-oriented,

walkable, bicycle-friendly land use, with mixed-use development. Many long-range sustainability and environmental goals articulated in the City's 2008 Comprehensive Plan could be explored. [EAC-Martin Tower-2016](#)

Think of it! “A showpiece of sustainable design”!

Gadfly imagines the Town Hall lights dimmed (except for that one damn light that seems to have a mind of its own! You know the one I mean.) and a crescendo of pencils tapping on chair arms leading up to the dramatic unveiling of Bethlehem's SHOWPIECE OF SUSTAINABLE DESIGN!

Followed by a collective gasp so strong it would suck the panels off the ceiling.

Be still my heart!

But – sigh – we live in a fallen world.

Common wisdom in the cheap seats is that the design for the Martin Tower site fell well short of a showcase.



In addition to submitting a detailed letter ([EAC-Martin Tower-2019](#)), EAC members Brian Hillard and Mike Topping attended the Planning Commission meeting April 11.

Listen to their different voices.

Brian, the younger guy, calm, diplomatic, showing just a trace of wry impatience at developer shortsightedness (“Looking at that pocket park, it's like in the pocket”), even-temperedly calling attention to things you would think the developer would certainly have highlighted (Bethlehem's Climate Action Plan, solar, etc.), and ending with an echo of the “showcase” dream: “This site was an icon to our city and our region, and we would be well served to continue with that thought. This could be an icon to the future as we remove the icon from the past.”

Mike, the older guy, experienced (“I used to sit on the other side of that table”), a bit gruff-voiced, tough talking, finding student designs better, forcefully invoking the specter of Levittown coming to Bethlehem, speaking definitively, authoritatively, for instance, about parking and subdividing (“It’s just wrong. It’s just not the way



things are done”), attributing the design to an unimaginative engineer when real planning (by someone capable of creating a “showcase”) should be done.

A marvelous 1-2 presentation from these EACers. Gadfly is not sure what impact these public voices can have on the Martin Tower project at this point. He doesn’t know as much as he needs to about the process of development. Such comments almost seem too late once the developer has presented a plan.

Maybe not.

Gadfly is sure, though, that we’d all like a “showcase.”

And this isn’t it. Yet.

How do we get such ideas in on the “ground floor,” as it were – at the beginning of the design process?

Gadfly will be trying to learn and think more.

Candidates – are you listening? Are you thinking?