



# What does Lehigh say about the City of Bethlehem in its Master Plan?

The Bethlehem Gadfly Lehigh University, Southside January 30, 2020

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

Thanks to a message from President Waldron, we now know what the next step on the Packer Avenue pilot study will be: “Council will not be discussing or voting on Packer Ave Tuesday. There is a communication on the agenda for a Use Permit Agreement, which we will be voting on Feb 18th. That is for the temporary closure.”

The temporary closing of Packer is slated for March 16 to the end of April, followed by assessment of results, and a decision by the Mayor. If the Mayor decides to move forward on a permanent closing of Packer, we are looking at a good several months before this issue comes before City Council.

That’s a long time. But once on his hobbyhorse, there is nothing Gadfly can do but hold on and ride it to the end.

So please bear with him another 2-3 posts till he gets Packer Avenue out of his system for a while.

While reading the Lehigh University 2012 Master Plan, he could not help focusing on what is said about the City.

Quite a lot actually.

Among the “Campus Master Plan Guiding Principles” we find:

- Leverage the presence of the University to better integrate the campus and South Bethlehem.

Among the four “Campus Master Plan Key goals” we find:

- Participating in the Renaissance of South Bethlehem  
Helping revitalize South Bethlehem and the partnerships needed to

achieve that will allow for distinctive student experiences and will make it an asset in recruiting students, faculty, and staff.

Let's sample some of the rhetoric describing Lehigh's vision of the town/gown relationship:

Lehigh University's campus is bordered by a neighborhood that is undergoing great change. While there remains great opportunity, there have been tremendous strides taken in South Bethlehem in recent years. There is a sense of optimism about the neighborhoods. The SteelStacks complex offers a focal point for music, arts and conference space. Thousands congregate in the summer months to hear free concerts at a pavilion built just in front of the stacks. The open space created by the Greenway has created pedestrian and recreational activity in South Bethlehem. First Fridays draw thousands more to patronize shops and restaurants. Still, there are challenges posed in revitalizing a formerly industrial city. Creating sustainable economic vitality, stabilizing neighborhoods and improving housing conditions, enhancing the quality of student rental housing, supporting the quality of public schools and ensuring safety in the neighborhoods require continued focus and effort. Lehigh University is actively engaged in the community. This Campus Master Plan builds on that engagement and outlines some paths the university might take to positively benefit South Bethlehem.

Frederick J. McGrail  
Vice President, Communications and Public Affairs

"Lehigh's future success is inextricably tied to that of the local community and the region. Universities serve as anchor institutions for cities, and the strategic role Lehigh can play in bringing about positive change is significant.

"Strategic Plan for Lehigh University, 2009

Lehigh University and South Bethlehem have a shared history stretching back to the early industrial development of the Lehigh Valley. With the closing of Bethlehem Steel, the former industrial center is transitioning to new sources of economic and cultural activity. The University provides a critical anchor within the community and in the region. The close physical connection between the campus and South Bethlehem's neighborhoods creates opportunities for engagement. The University and the community share an interest in fostering a safe, stable, and

vibrant urban environment with a diversity of housing and employment opportunities and a pedestrian-oriented retail district. Building on this history and the momentum of existing plans and programs, the Campus Master Plan identifies a place-based real estate strategy for engagement and partnership in South Bethlehem. In addition, as one possible example, the South Bethlehem Catalyst identifies the reuse of the Lehigh-owned Service Building as an initiative that can support both the University's academic vision and the revitalization of the neighborhood.

The Master Plan chapter describes “Three Place-based Strategies”:

- Area improvement through acquisition or rehabilitation
- Develop a dense mixed-use housing project through partnership
- Participate in a neighborhood improvement district

These strategies are very interesting. Here is the place where the Lehigh rhetoric rubber meets the road. Gadfly will see if he can't arrange to copy out and post this important section (for us) of the Master Plan.

But how are you feeling about what you've read so far?

*to be continued . . .*