

On 3rd St., competition for student renters, suggestion for complementary design

The Bethlehem Gadfly 404 E. 3rd St. April 10, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts on 404 E. 3rd St* 

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

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

404 E. 3rd is aimed at the student market.

The pitch the developer made to the Planning Commission was very “politic,” indicating they were intently following the City discussion of regulating student housing, were aware of the purposes of that project, even specifying them, and denoting 4 synergies with their project:

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Just .3/mile from the edge of the Lehigh campus, this project will help pull students out of the neighborhood row homes

- and that will encourage more retail business on 3rd. St.
- The project is close to multiple modes of public transportation,
- and will have substantial economic impact for the city, since the property pays only \$499/tax this year (\$105 to the City), basically nothing, and now will be taxed at \$180,000 (\$39,500 to the City).

Gadfly found the following brief comments by the developer about their relation to and relationship with Lehigh very interesting. If Gadfly understands correctly, Lehigh has publicly stated that it is providing housing for all of its students on campus, so what we have here is a stark example of minding the main chance — the developer realizing that he can offer a premium product to students for whom price is not a concern.

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- We designed Polk Street [310-22 E. 3rd St. — his nearby companion building] . . . things where I would want my daughter to be That

shows we can get a premium in the market if we have the right product.

- We're not talking with Lehigh because we're competing with Lehigh quite frankly.
- We're trying to grab the best of the best out of Lehigh and bring them down here.
- We're going after the top of their student housing stack, if you will.
- I view us as a competitor to Lehigh, truthfully.
- They've been a great competitor for us because it has been easy to pick off what we want.
- We think we're a better mousetrap.

But the best part of the commentary on the new project came from Kim Carrell-Smith, whom we have come to recognize always has sensible comments based on research as well on her lived experience on the Southside and her good taste. As Kim has done before, she asks for design of the new building that "blends" better with its neighbor to the west built by the same company.

- I wonder if we could persuade you to work on a complementary design to your first building [310-22 E. 3rd St.].
- It would add to the character of what you have already done.
- It would definitely provide a kind of gentle way to come from the historic district out of the historic district.
- I think that would be a great thing for the community.
- It would be a great thing for the historic district.
- And a good thing for the shopping, living, playing public.
- Could you fill that niche with a building that doesn't detract from your initial project?



proposed S.E. corner 3rd and Polk, outside historic district



current S.W. corner 3rd and Polk, inside historic district

Blend these better?

Such a good idea, Kim!