



# Lehigh goes all the way — online till end of semester: Packer closing study ends for now

The Bethlehem Gadfly Lehigh University, Southside March 16, 2020

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

Lehigh has bowed to the virus and decided to go online for the rest of the semester. The traffic study that began March 9 is scrapped for now. Interestingly, people such as Councilwoman Van Wirt suggested the study be put off till the fall while talks about use of the road space might develop. Ironically, that might happen now.

If the temporary closure of Packer between Vine and Webster is renewed this fall, these recent follower ideas and questions should be remembered:

- A public meeting with the City/ Lehigh needs to occur during/ after the temporary closure. Notice of the meeting should appear on the electronic message board at Packer and Vine as well as in news and social media. (southsidenannygoat)
- Wondering if Lehigh is going to take a look at the businesses along 3rd and 4th st, during, and after, the Packer ave closure, to see if there is an increase in business due to the closing. That's one of Lehigh's main talking points, that the closure is going to bring more foot traffic down to those businesses, and it'll be more profitable for them. (Patrick Wirth)
- Recently visited Marietta, Ga. I was interested that the town square was donated to the town by the first mayor John Glover, provided it was always used as a town square. If not the land would be returned to his heirs. Since apparently a vacated Packer Ave. would become property of Lehigh University, shouldn't a similar provision be secured so they don't turn it into dorms or some other unwanted use. (Jerry Diguilio)

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To complete the record so far, here, obtained by Right-to-Know, is the Lehigh memo to City Council just before the February 18 meeting in which Council voted to support the temporary closing of Packer Ave. The memo repeats the same basic three reasons for the test and details changes made as a result of the public meeting at Broughal School on January 28.

Date: February 14, 2020

Re: The Proposed Test Closure of Packer Avenue

Dear City Council Members,

We are writing to provide a brief summary of the proposal to temporarily close Packer Avenue to test the impact a closure has on traffic, parking and pedestrians. As you know, we will present details of this proposal at your February 18 meeting.

If approved, the closure would begin on March 9, 2020 and continue until April 30, 2020. We are proposing the test closure for three reasons 1) concerns about safety for the 1,200 pedestrians that cross primarily at University Walk 2) a desire to knit together the Lehigh campus, which this street bisects, and to hopefully draw more students to the South Bethlehem business district 3) creating an attractive pedestrian walkway for both the Lehigh community and the Bethlehem community. We recognize there are long-standing cultural issues that can make our campus feel inaccessible to the Bethlehem community and we hope this closure might address that.

We have conducted preliminary traffic and parking studies, which indicate Packer Avenue is used primarily by university students, faculty and staff. 85% of the cars parked on Packer Ave already have a Lehigh University parking permit for Lehigh parking lots elsewhere on campus. We have greatly expanded bus routes and we have more than enough university parking available for those currently using Packer Avenue.

In addition, those studies suggested the impact from traffic and parking on nearby streets was minimal. The temporary closure, during which we have commissioned additional traffic and parking studies, will determine whether that is the case and provide data.

Based on feedback during a public meeting and direction from city officials, we have significantly expanded the scope of the traffic study, which will be conducted during the closure. The expanded scope will include a pedestrian count of Broughal Middle School students walking to and from school. The expanded areas of the study will

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include 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> streets, Carlton, Summit and Montclair Avenues, 1<sup>st</sup> Terrace, Polk and Fillmore streets.

The road will remain accessible to city emergency vehicles, deliveries and individuals with disabilities.

We have met with the officials of the Bethlehem Area School District and the Broughal School and addressed issues they have raised. We will deploy five Lehigh University personnel to serve as crossing guards at key intersections where Broughal students walk.

Finally, we understand this closure is a test and are prepared to end it prior to the six-week trial period if it results in significant disruption.