


Closing Packer Avenue: more on what the Mayor had to say

The Bethlehem Gadfly Lehigh University, Southside January 28, 2020

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

The January 23 Broughal public meeting was a few people in a large auditorium with dim lighting and without mics — not ideal for recording. Sorry, you may need to put your audio volume setting at the highest level.

Gadfly loves your participating voices. Public meeting: democracy in action.

But let's begin with a Gadfly question that eventually elicits as firm and as declarative a response from the Mayor as he has heard in his 16 months on duty. In this clip, the ever skeptical Gadfly asks if closing Packer Avenue is a done deal (the phrase that always makes Gadfly shudder).

*“No decision has been made to close Packer Avenue **Period.**”*

Let's listen to the Mayor again. The meeting was ending. The Mayor was giving thanks when I think it was Kim Carrell Smith who wedged in one last question that importantly elicited from the Mayor his sensitivity to the dark history of Lehigh interaction with the Southside as well as another statement of his goals regarding the Lehigh/City relationship.

Very poor quality. Turn the volume up. Be patient. Important words.

“You just don't change the whole feeling of a community in a matter of years.”

So the Mayor of course is aware of a history of ill will in the community toward Lehigh (Gadfly always suggests that you browse the [“Lost Neighborhood”](#) web site), is aware of lingering resentment.

Which begs the question, was the neighboring residential community aware of the meeting? If so, it would not seem that community was well represented at the meeting. A few posts ago Councilwoman Olga Negron even questioned calling it a “public meeting,” wondering, for instance, if Broughal parents were notified.

So a man asked about the “community engagement” plan for the meeting. A good question.

“For the promotion of this meeting, what was your methodology?”

Audio Player not available in this archive

Aside from the fact that the “invitation” was translated into Spanish, that question was not answered.

Remember that we did the City Communication Survey last year. That was mainly about how we communicate with the City. We need to think the other way around. How does the City communicate with us in a case like this?

There was a message in English and Spanish on Facebook January 15 — 8 days before the meeting. Gadfly’s no expert on announcement timing, but that may be too far ahead, and a follow-up might have been in order.

But is Facebook the best way for the specific Southside community that should be reached for this purpose? What do you think?

And was this the only thing done? Gadfly wishes Lehigh administrator Adrienne McNeil had given more information.

Was the City aggressive enough in getting the word out and stirring up attendance? Has this pilot program been discussed at the Southside Task Force or Southside 2020 or other groups? Were notices in the Hispanic Center? Whatever.

We hope.

to be continued . . .