

# Chewing on SBHS concerns: Gadfly's response (3)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Neighborhoods, Serious Issues, Southside June 10, 2019

*(The latest in a series of posts on the Southside and Neighborhoods)*

Gadfly's interest in Bethlehem history is not "academic." Though he was by trade a literary historian.

Bethlehem is the scene of much significant history. Bethlehem has three historical districts. Bethlehem has made history part of its cultural identity as well as commercial identity – and commercial vitality.

And yet history is a source of tension in this town.

A lot has been done to preserve our history.

And yet a significant segment of our residents feels that when it comes to respect for history there is a fissure between rhetoric and practice.

There is a lot of rhetoric.

But Gadfly wonders sometimes – seriously – how deeply respect for Bethlehem's history actually runs among some of our City's leaders.

This suspicion – that respect for our history is only skin deep – accounts for the Bethlehem Moment project.

I started thinking of the need for a project of that sort after attending only a few City Council meetings during the Gadfly internship period.

But that is another story.

This post is about chewing again on the emotionally powerful letter from the South Bethlehem Historical Society delivered by president Lou James to the Mayor and City Council at the May 22 Council meeting.

Gadfly cannot shake that letter.

The developer-quoted statement, however benevolently meant – “in ten years you will not recognize South Bethlehem” – haunts him.

Write that line on a sticky and paste it to your bathroom mirror.

At Council June 4, Gadfly called the SBHS letter “sad.” At Council June 4, Gadfly said that it would be a “sin” if the letter were not answered.

“Sin”? A bit much, yes – Gadfly taught for 50+ years, mostly without prepared lectures. Sometimes passion gets the better of him. Sorry.

But Gadfly was appalled by the possibility that such a carefully crafted, calmly delivered letter on so serious a concern would evaporate in the Town Hall rafters.

And just become another case in point for cynical residents who believe it matters naught to bring your concerns “to City Hall.”

Gadfly fights that cynicism. Gadfly believes that a reasonable answer could be made to that letter. That there is a legitimate other perspective.

Gadfly believes that good conversation builds community.

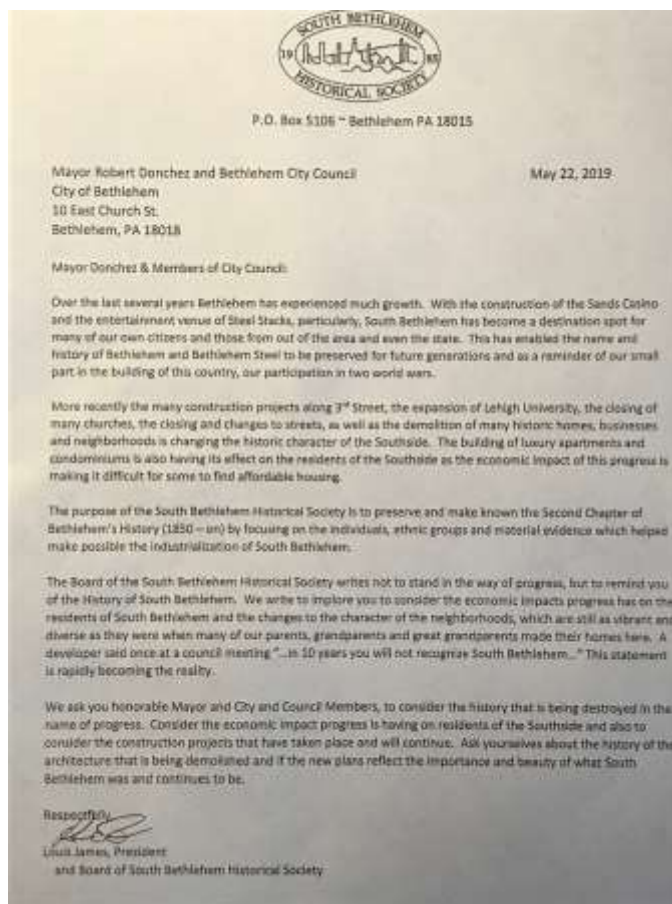
He was afraid no conversation would happen. Opportunity lost.

Let's read/watch/listen to the May 22 SBHS letter again. Then go on to Gadfly's comment about it on June 4. And you be the judge.

Here's Lou James, president of the South Bethlehem Historical Society:

## AUDIO RECORDINGS UNAVAILABLE IN THIS ARCHIVE

See also the [video of the May 22 Council meeting](#) at min. 4:02.



Now here's Gadfly at the [June 4 Council meeting \(video at min. 16:25\)](#):

- I hope that letter gets answered somehow.
- It's a sad letter.
- James was “imploing” you. He was the unempowered asking the powerful people to listen to his pain and his plea.
- If that letter goes up poof into the air and doesn't get a response, it's kind of a sin – kind of a political sin.

- Somebody's gotta respond to that letter.
- The tension between history and development . . . has to be straight out addressed somehow, not just left to a vote which makes one side win.

Gadfly was happy that there was a pointed response to the SBHS letter late in the June 4 meeting under New Business in a significant interchange between Councilpersons Negron and Callahan.

Let's take that up next time.