

# Lehigh University recognizes the need to hear “all voices” (10)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Gadfly's posts, Lehigh University, Serious Issues November 1, 2018

*(10th in a series of posts on Lehigh University)*

*“What have we learned today, Squidward?”*

*SpongeBob SquarePants*

Just reading the headlines will tell you the story:

Jessica Hicks and Musa Jamshed, “Trembley demolition eliminates on-campus housing for upperclassmen next academic year.” *Brown and White [Lehigh University], October, 29, 2018.*

*“There will be no on-campus living options for juniors and seniors during the 2019-2020 academic year, according to an email sent from Housing Services on Monday. . . . According to the email sent to rising juniors and seniors, the first phase of the Bridge West residence hall project was approved this past week, which will include the demolition of the Trembley Park apartment complex. The time between Trembley’s demolition and the completion of Bridge West will present a shortage in supply for on-campus housing in the next academic year.”*

**Sara K. Satullo, “Lehigh to upperclassmen: We’re out of cheap dorms so you’ll need to live off campus.” lehighvalleylive, October 31, 2018.**

*“Lehigh University sophomore Rebekah Nicholas is considering dropping out of school after the university dropped a bombshell in her email inbox Monday. . . . Lehigh is tearing down the Trembley Park apartment complex, located at 68 University Drive, to build its Bridge West residence hall project, which was approved by the Bethlehem Planning Commission earlier this month. The demolition and construction is leaving a shortage of on-campus housing for the upcoming academic year.”*

**Sara K. Satullo, “Oops! Lehigh University doesn’t have a dorm shortage.” lehighvalleylive, October 31, 2018.**

*“The news of the on-campus housing shortage was met with swift action by Lehigh students, who organized a Path to Poverty Campaign, a coalition of more than 10 student clubs and organizations, protesting the housing switch. The name is a nod to Lehigh’s Path to Prominence, which aims to increase Lehigh enrollment by 1,000 undergraduate and 500 to 800 full-time graduate students over seven years.”*

Daniel Patrick Sheehan, “Addressing housing uproar, Lehigh University says residence hall won’t be demolished this summer.” *Morning Call*, October 31, 2018.

*“All voices are important and have been greatly appreciated. We are committed to an open dialogue and transparent process which engages students and helps us make decisions that best serve our campus community,” said Lehigh President John Simon and Lehigh Provost Patrick Farrell.*

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A few years ago Gadfly was babysitting some of the grandkids, watching *SpongeBob* we were, when we heard “what have we learned today, Squidward?” and laughed and laughed.

Because it wasn’t far distant from what Gadfly had been saying and they had been hearing throughout their penitential session of my care.

Immediately “what have we learned today, Squidward?” was incorporated into family teaching-moment vocabulary, especially when something dumb was done that shouldn’t be repeated.

And don’t think the kids haven’t turned it around and used it on the adults. Gadfly has faced that humbling question more than once.

Well, what did we learn today about Lehigh University?

We learned that top minds in the country with eyes skyward raising a billion dollars on the Path to Prominence were blind to some important components – human components — right under their feet. The students.

What did Lehigh University learn today?

That they must commit or re-commit to an open dialogue and transparency that includes students:

*“In the past 24 hours, you have raised thoughtful and legitimate concerns ranging from timing of the message, to availability of comparably priced housing options, to a need for greater transparency in Lehigh’s master planning efforts,” the email [from Simon and Farrell] states. “Your individual and collective voices have shared personal stories and sets of circumstances that guide, and even dictate, student housing decisions. You have also shared your thoughts on how this week’s announcement might affect our broader residential community. All voices are important and have been greatly appreciated.”*

Wow!

You gotta love it! The witty and resourceful students – some of the brightest and some of the most affluent in the country – immediately organized a Path to Poverty to sarcastically mirror the Path to Prominence.

Just beautiful! They had power, knew it, and used it.

Now as Gadfly has said in this sequence of posts several times, what Lehigh does on its own campus is its own business.

But this flaw, this blindspot in the Path to Prominence serves to highlight the possibility – and Gadfly reiterates, it may only be a possibility – of another flaw or blindspot in reference to the (pretty far) off-campus parking that will probably be the fate of lower-wage'd workers, some of whom will be City residents and tax payers (some of whom may not be technically Lehigh employees).

All Gadfly has been asking is “transparency” in regard to these people before the City makes any more decisions. We hear the City wasn't aware of Lehigh bumping these students off-campus. Is there anything else the City hasn't heard about?

If there are flaws in a BigPlan, they will probably be at the bottom of the plan. BigPlanners are magnificently farsighted. They will leave to others lower, often far lower in the chain of command to figure out how to make things work on the ground.

Like where everybody is going to park.

The people Gadfly is talking about don't have power (tuition dollars), don't have a voice, aren't organized, may be easily replaceable, and are therefore especially vulnerable.

Lehigh has recognized “a need for greater transparency in Lehigh's master planning efforts.”

Lehigh has listened to “individual and collective voices [that] have shared personal stories and sets of circumstances.”

Lehigh has firmly stated that “All voices are important and have been greatly appreciated.”

But have they heard from everybody? That's all Gadfly is asking.

“What have we learned today, Squidward?”

*One of the ways you measure a just society is the way it treats its most vulnerable people.*