

## 548 N. New St: apartments and wine bar

The Bethlehem Gadfly 548 N. New St., Neighborhoods, Northside, Serious Issues September 10, 2019

*(1st in a series of posts about 548 N. New St.)*





Gadfly found himself very reflective after the Planning Commission meeting of August 26.

And — to tell the truth — sad.

Let's lay the groundwork for some discussion of the City planning process by focusing on one case at that meeting.

The Benner brothers plan to demolish an old twin at 546-48 N. New St. and replace it with a modern 6-story apartment building with a wine bar on the first floor.

Parking will be arranged in the Walnut St. garage across the street (possible problem there). Northbound New St. will change from the current two lanes to one in the block in front of the building between Walnut St. and Broad St.



Picture 546-48 N. New, just slightly south of Broad. It used to house the James Judd agency, where Gadfly got a mortgage a 100 years ago. Looking head-on as in the picture above, the former Penn Pizza space is on the left and the long-living dance studio is in the building on the right (wave if you are a member of the 540 Club). It is not fully occupied at the moment.

The building is just outside the historic district.

Load up on the details and context from the newspaper stories, and then we'll come back and find out why Gadfly was sad.

*Sara Satullo, "Developer wants to raze Bethlehem building for wine bar, 33 apartments." [lehighvalleylive.com](http://lehighvalleylive.com), August 23, 2019.*

Developers Garrett and Brandon Benner want to tear down a three-story downtown Bethlehem building, replacing it with a six-story building with retail on the first floor and 33 apartments. The property sits just outside the border of the north side Historic District.

The brothers plan to construct a modern-style building that incorporates materials in harmony with the surrounding neighborhood's historic nature, said Garrett Benner. The duo's again hired the Philadelphia firm SITIO as the project architect. Firm founder Antonio Fiol-Silva designed both the Levitt Pavilion and the Hoover-Mason Trestle on South Side Bethlehem and is behind the Benners' Skyline West project on West Broad Street.

"We try to be sensitive to the surrounding area," Garrett Benner said.

The first floor will feature a wine bar — the developer declined to identify the tenant yet — with a mix of studios, one-and-two bedroom market-rate apartments with "great finishes" and washers and dryers in the units, he said. The majority of the two-bedroom apartments are corner units.

To create a loading zone in front of the building, the right-hand turning lane on New Street would be eliminated and new metered spaces will go in front of Rosanna's and Penn Pizza, said Tracy Samuelson, city assistant director of planning and zoning.

After pursuing the project for a long time, there's a huge demand for new apartments in downtown Bethlehem, Garrett Benner said. The developer's Bungalow apartments, in the former Togs building next to the Old Brewery Tavern, were fully leased in under two months.

This investment paired with the \$22 million redevelopment of the Boyd Theatre property into 120 apartments and retail could represent a



turning point for a stretch of the downtown that's long vexed city leaders. The decaying Boyd properties create a sharp demarcation between the city's restaurant row and Main Street shopping and restaurants further up East Broad Street.

*Nicole Radzievich, "Wine bar, apartments approved to replace century-old brick structure in Bethlehem." Morning Call, August 27, 2019.*

A century-old brick structure just outside Bethlehem's historic district would be demolished to make way for a six-story, modern apartment building with a first-floor wine bar, under plans the Bethlehem Planning Commission approved Monday. The \$7.5 million project would put 33 apartments a block from historic Main Street and around the corner from a sleepy Broad Street block where the shuttered Boyd Theatre is expected to be replaced by a \$22 million apartment project.

Brandon Benner, who is developing the project with his brother Garrett, said the proposed building had an "invigorating design that would draw people wanting to live and spend money downtown."

"When modern design is actually done right ... it not only compliments it but also enhances the historic architecture," Benner said.

"I think the design is going to elevate the architecture in the surrounding '70s-designed buildings in the future," Cohen said. "I think this will infuse a lot of excitement in the area."

But the scale and design didn't sit well with a couple residents in the audience. Noting the close proximity to the historic architecture for which Bethlehem is heralded, Kim Carrell-Smith questioned the wisdom of replacing a "dignified twin that was built around 1900" with a "glass and metal luxury high-rise apartment."

“Although perhaps appropriate for other communities and maybe other places in Bethlehem, it’s not in keeping with what makes Bethlehem’s downtown area, whether South Side or North Side, a unique and appealing place,” she said. “I’m kind of baffled by the gross mischaracterization that this modern building fits into the historic district downtown and compliments it.”

The project is being designed by SITIO architecture. That’s the same Philadelphia firm that is designing Skyline West, an modern apartment project that is replacing an early 20th century residence in the historic district on West Broad Street overlooking the Colonial Industrial Quarter. The Benners also are involved in that project.

Under the apartment project proposed on North New Street, the Benners agreed to upgrade pedestrian improvements, retime traffic lights and use the Walnut Street parking garage for parking. A right-hand turn lane on New Street also would be eliminated.

Whatta y’think?

*to be continued*