

“What we have in front of us is going to be a pretty big stretch for us”

The Bethlehem Gadfly 319-327 S. New, Development, Southside February 21, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts on 319-327 S. New St.* 

ref: **Another developer thinking big . . . er, tall**

ref: **The HCC discusses the proposal for 319-327 S. New**

ref: **“The current proposal for a 12-story structure is inappropriate”**

We’re going slow (as usual for Gadfly!) trying to get a sense of the dynamics that played out when the proposal for a 12-story building (82 apartments!) on the Southside came before the Historic Conservation Commission on January 25.

In the last post we looked in detail at Historic Officer Jeff Long’s opening presentation, one in which, while finding good things in the proposal, Long advised against total demolition on the site and advised that the height of the building was inappropriate.

Now let’s look at the discussion that followed Long’s presentation: first by the Commissioners in this post, then by the developer in the next post.

To a person, the Commissioners who spoke, while recognizing appropriate stylistic elements in the facade design and positive aspects in the concept (apartments plus Food Court), had substantial concern about the height. One Commissioner stressed that economics was not part of this Commission’s purview.

HCC chair Gary Lader:

Lader, who has called the project “exciting,” here lays out the mission of the HCC for the developer. The HCC focuses on “maintaining the historic exteriors of the buildings . . . the streetscape . . . the scale and massing . . . maintaining the integrity of these neighborhoods . . . We’re in a challenging position . . . We want to see development . . . help enhance and protect the community . . . We want to encourage folks like you to

come in and do great stuff, but we gotta preserve some of these buildings . . . Right now what we have in front of us is going to be a pretty big stretch for us.”

Craig Evans:

“The building is attractive . . . The problem I deal with is the 12 stories being beyond what’s anywhere around it, and I’m not sure how to deal with that, but that’s the challenge I have to grapple with first. Stylistically, I think it’s commendable. In terms of development, I think it’s important to do. But we have to do it right . . . How high is it?”

Roger Hudak:

“It’s high, high, way too high . . . It’s like a cavern . . . The size of that thing bothers me . . . It’s way too tall . . . I just think it’s too tall.”

Seth Cornish:

“As a real estate broker, I’m really fond of development . . . make money . . . revitalize areas . . . a Southside that is predominantly 2-3-4 stories high . . . couple notable exceptions . . . that rhythm of 2-3-4 story buildings is one of the most important keys to our historic district . . . We are a historic commission, and while we are supposed to be concerned with economics, the economics are not really what drives us . . . What really we are charged to do is preserve what is there, the vibrancy of the theme of the area . . . My opinion is that in that particular location, 5 stories is historically appropriate . . . Above 5 stories, I’m probably not going to agree that it’s historically appropriate.”

Beth Starbuck:

“Something’s coming down the pike . . . we will have some more restriction on height, and it’s certainly going to be quite a bit lower than 12 stories . . . We need to make this building a lot shorter . . . That being said, there is a lot about the building that is very nice, and I really appreciate the effort that has gone in trying to making it have some of the character the surrounding buildings do.”