

# Gadfly at the BPA

The Bethlehem Gadfly Parking, Serious Issues September 26, 2019

*(120th in a series of posts on parking)*

Gadfly just had to get this off his chest.

Deliver'd the following prepared statement during public comment at the Parking Authority Board meeting yesterday. (The audio of the meeting will eventually be available on the [BPA web site](#).)

Asked that a member of the Board make a motion to include it in the minutes or to attach it to the minutes. No one did.

By the way, the BPA still did not publish the agenda for the meeting beforehand.

Cranky ol' Gadfly.

Still pursuing the white whale. (in joke)

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Ed Gallagher

BPA Board meeting

9/25/2019

I am puzzled by the Board chair's immediate response to the "technical review" of the Nova and Peron proposals at the August 28 Board meeting: "Basically two 5-story buildings, retail on first floor, apartments above." That response — without any appreciation of subtlety, without any appreciation of nuance in the City evaluation — flattens the two proposals into undifferentiated clones, thereby justifying the higher purchase price as the determinative factor. If the proposals are the same, yes, certainly, by all means, take the higher offer by Peron. Makes perfect sense.

But in my judgment, a judgment based on the City evaluation that the Board requested, the proposals are clearly not the same. The proposals, in fact, are significantly different. Here, according to the City evaluation, is what we lose by favoring Peron:

- possibly 45 apartments instead of 32 (whether Nova proposed 5 floors of residential as indicated in the City report or 4 was, strangely, not resolved)
- "a mixture of market rate residential apartment sizes, presenting a potentially more resilient residential product"
- "a rooftop restaurant concept, providing greater use of the building by the public and potentially driving more transient parkers to the Polk Street Parking Garage"
- a design "emulating elements found on the former Bethlehem Steel site"
- a design that "not only encourages the pedestrian interest in the Third Street corridor, but also draws interest down Polk Street"
- a design adding "a variety of building styles to the corridor and . . . inclusive of more desirable design elements"
- "overall aesthetics, including the stone arches reflecting the ruins and the steel elements, [that] provide an overall stronger relationship to the place in which the building is located"

- “proposed use of the building [that] is more comprehensive, providing commercial opportunities beyond first floor retail and greater opportunity for use by the general public”

To me, this positive mix in Nova of the practical, financial, historical, aesthetic, and architectural — this mix of novelty and beauty — this appeal to City goals of a walkable city and the link to our heritage — was *surely worthy of discussion*.

But the BPA sped to approval of Peron in one minute, fifty seconds.

Was there not one point in the City analysis worthy of discussion?

But as the motion-maker said, “I looked at both of those projects closely, and they’re similar, but there are differences, but I can’t get past the difference in price.”

The BPA Board saw its chief purpose in this decision getting the greatest amount of money for itself. At the end of the day, “It’s dollars and cents,” said a third Board member.

A decision based on money without evaluation of the financial aspects of the proposals because of “significant variances in contract parking spaces and some uncertainty around the potential for CRIZ increment generation.”

It would have taken great courage for one of the Board members to say even, “Whoa, hold on a minute. We owe it to common decency to hear from the City Committee we asked to take a look at this and who are here at the meeting. And we owe it to the public to make sure we have thoroughly considered all perspectives in making our decision.”

It would have taken even greater courage for one of the Board members to say, “Let’s put the money aside for a few minutes, we can always come back to it, but our purpose here is not simply to make money for the Parking Authority, and the question we should be front-loading is how do these proposals align with City goals — which proposal is best for the City at large.”

I was looking for someone on the BPA Board to say, “At the end of the day we have the opportunity to advance City goals of a walkable City, to have a building that speaks of our Bethlehem history, the opportunity to do something special, exciting, unique. Let’s see if we can take advantage of this opportunity and still be fiscally responsible to the Parking Authority.”

*adapted from a post on the Bethlehem Gadfly blog September 9, 2019.*

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