

**Att: Everybody but especially Garrison Streeters,
First Terracers, Armory-ers, W. Marketers!
Southsiders need our support preserving their
neighborhood**

The Bethlehem Gadfly Lehigh University, Southside October 22, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on the Southside* 

Community Development Committee meeting

Thursday, October 22, 6PM

[view on YouTube](#)

call-in number: (610) 997-7963

[sign the letter of support here](#)

Neighborhoods are worth fighting for, the Gadfly has always said.

And over the last two years he has joined with you in that fighting in various parts of the City.

Now the Southsiders around Lehigh need our help.

An ordinance to regulate student housing in that neighborhood comes before the City Council Community Development Committee tonight.

The proposal is fair, reasonable, well researched, collegially developed, and modeled on national best practices.

It has the imprimatur of the City Administration.

It has been approved by the Planning Commission.

It has been approved by the Zoning Board.

All it needs now is City Council approval.

But we can expect that there will be strong business and perhaps institutional forces opposing it.

Please read the following letter to Council signed by several dozen of the affected neighbors.

And then see the ways in which you can help.

10 October 2020

Dear Members of Bethlehem City Council:

As South Bethlehem residents committed to the long-term health of our neighborhoods, we write to ask you to vote to approve the zoning ordinance creating a “Student Home Overlay District” and containing other provisions to address student housing.

Drafted by the Office of Planning and Zoning for the City of Bethlehem, this ordinance emerges from more than two years of sustained work by officials at City Hall and it responds directly to urgent concerns expressed by South Side residents over years – at City Council meetings, at Planning Commission, and at dedicated public forums that many of you have attended.

We are South Side homeowners and renters. Some of us are living in homes that our families have occupied for two or three generations. Others are more recent arrivals, having purchased homes that we have lovingly maintained. We have invested in the city, paying taxes, owning and patronizing local businesses, teaching in area schools and colleges. We look out for one another and we cherish our neighborhoods, which are precisely the kind of stable, ethnically diverse, mixed-income communities that city officials say they wish to promote.

But our neighborhoods are in danger. Out-of-state student rental developers have repeatedly sought to purchase whole blocks, threatening home-owners that our properties will become worthless if we do not sell immediately. They have repeatedly proposed destructive, out-of-scale student rental developments, seeking to intimidate us by explaining that our neighborhood will become unlivable for families, the elderly, and children.

These are not idle threats. Student rental companies, large and small, have already purchased so many homes in some South Side neighborhoods (especially those adjacent to Lehigh), that formerly vibrant mixed-income neighborhoods have disappeared. Streets like Montclair Avenue, Fifth Street, and lower Hillside Avenue have, in effect, become student rental zones and the density of student housing has brought pervasive dynamics (loud parties, week after week; vandalism; public urination; etc.) that have driven most families from the neighborhood. These are not fantasies or exaggeration: some of us live in these neighborhoods. Others of us live on blocks that remain healthy and viable, including small numbers of students rentals, but we watch with alarm as, month after month, student rental companies purchase more homes – and each of us questions how much longer we can remain, unless the city passes needed regulations.

The proposed zoning ordinance, developed by consultation with experts about best practices in other college towns and with input from local stakeholders, provides a common sense solution. It encourages student rental development in neighborhoods that already contain a high density of student housing. Outside that overlay district, it limits the number of student renters who can live in a single home, which will provide an effective check on the uncontrolled, profit-driven development that now threatens to unravel the neighborhoods in which we live and that we love.

Please act swiftly now to approve this urgently needed zoning revision,

To show your support, you can:

- add your name to a letter to Council from affordable housing advocates throughout our community: [CLICK HERE](#) to read and sign.

and/or

- speak at tonight's Community Development Committee meeting in support of the proposal: you can sign up in advance or call (610) 997-7963 when the chair asks for public comment. If you would like to sign up to speak, email the following information to the Bethlehem City Clerk's office (cityclerk@bethlehem-pa.gov) no later than 2:00 PM on October 22, 2020 (a) name; (b) address; (c) phone number; and (d) topic of comments. If you are signed up to speak, the Committee Chair will call you from (610) 997-7963.

ref: ["Important meeting Thursday on regulating student housing to protect Southside neighborhood"](#)

ref: ["Here's how everybody can help protect the Southside neighborhood"](#)

ref: ["More information on the proposal to regulate student housing"](#)

ref: ["Please sign letter supporting proposal to regulate student housing"](#)

ref: ["Need for student housing regulation long recognized – Now's the time – Please "sign on"](#)