

Resident suggests sending an “unambiguous message” to the developer

The Bethlehem Gadfly 319-327 S. New, Development, Southside February 25, 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”**

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

ref: **“Going to 5-6 stories definitely wouldn’t work”**

ref: **Southside developer blows some smoke**

ref: **The developer plays hard ball**

Historical Conservation Commission meeting on proposed new construction on South New St. February 22, 2021: chapter 3.

HCC chair Lader turned to public comment. Which public comment — calling out the developer for a clearly improper proposal and calling on the Commission to do its sworn duty — made Gadfly proud and provided the *coup de gras* for the proposal in its current form.

The comments are all short, and Gadfly encourages you to at least listen to some.

Model public participation. Democracy in action.

Gadfly loves your voices. Take the opportunity to listen.

It’s difficult to choose between them, but if you have time to listen to only one clip, Gadfly would recommend Seth Moglen’s.

Hard, economical, no nonsense, bulls-eye words there.

They sum up the situation for Gadfly.

Anna Smith: “You’re here to filter out the argument that things can only be done one way and that passing up a single development opportunity will doom our community forever after. . . . You know that the developers have learned how to play the game, ask for 12 stories when you want 8, which the evidence suggests is what the developer is aiming for.” A conclusion that Smith backs up very nicely by doing some math with the data about parking spaces.

Kim Carrell-Smith: “Compatibility, that is, being context-sensitive . . . is vital in historical areas.” Carrell-Smith draws on research studies such as we’ve seen in her “Historical preservation pays” posts, reminds the Commission of the guidelines, reminds them that height matters. She points out that there are no renderings of the streetscape from the north, which perspective would clearly show how out of scale the proposed building is. “I urge you to maintain the integrity of your guidelines.”

Dana Grubb: Grubb, who helped write the ordinance, wonders why we have guidelines when he sees this proposal. He worries about creating a canyon in this area of New St. “It’s almost disingenuous” for a developer to come in with this kind of proposal. What would happen if such a thing were to be proposed on the Northside. He questions the sincerity of the developer. Too many open questions. “Your charge is to help protect that district.”

Rachel Leon: “Affordable housing doesn’t always mean accessible housing.” The price of these apartments is double, triple the amount of a mortgage. Leon is also worried about the negative affect on the air quality from the construction, even if short-term.

Al Wurth: The historical district is a small place, and it’s not good to jam such an inappropriate structure in. Worth is worried about the building looming over the street and encroaching over Graham Place and especially the Greenway. And how about air rights? “I’m depending on the Historic Commission to protect us from this overreach.”

Breana Holland: You must evaluate the building for its compatibility with predominant building size in the district between 1890s and 1950? Why is the developer and some of the public referencing more modern buildings. The size at the Zest building is the exception that tests the rule not the exception that proves the rule. The Zest building does not fit. We

still need the rule. Imagine the sun being blocked on the New St. corridor. This proposal would create a dark canyon, a tunnel kind of feeling.

Seth Moglen: “This is a simple and straightforward situation.” The project is “grossly out of line” with the guidelines. The developer has indicated a “deep disrespect” for the Commission and the Southside. The people speaking here are deeply committed to the vitality of the Southside, people who would support “responsible development” at this location. “This is simply a project which is entirely out of scale,” and the Commission should send an “unambiguous message” to the developer, who is trying to “strong arm” the Commission. Tell them they must bring a project which is in scale.

So The HCC decided against voting on the developer’s request to approve demolition. They approved a motion to do nothing at this time.

What’s next?

Gadfly is not sure.

At the end of the meeting chair Lader offered to the developer that he had received “clarity.” The developer agreed. But said nothing more.

We’ll have to see what happens. Ball in the developer’s court again. HCC in the middle again.

Gadfly worries about the politics.

He hears the developer several times refer reassuringly to his several meetings with the Mayor, City Administrators, and *even Council members*.

Even Council members.

And wonders what signals and what support he is getting from those sources.