

# A Lehigh study on the proposed Packer Ave. closing

The Bethlehem Gadfly | Lehigh University, Southside | January 22, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about Lehigh University and the Southside* 

**Pilot study: temporary closing of Packer Avenue  
Public meeting from 6 to 8 p.m. Jan. 23 at the  
Broughal Middle School Auditorium**

*Nicole Radzievich, “Should Bethlehem close this major street near Lehigh University?” Morning Call, January 16, 2020.*

Here is a “Sustainability Impact Assessment” on the proposed Packer Ave. closing performed by a Lehigh University graduate class a year ago.

Gadfly always says go to the primary sources. Let’s try to take a look before tomorrow night’s meeting (of course, the only other call on our time is an impeachment — history unfolding before our eyes).

**Packer Avenue Promenade Project: Sustainability Impact Assessment  
(May 2019)**

## Conclusion

Sustainability considers impacts on human, environmental, and economic well-being. A Sustainability Impact Assessment (SIA) is an expansion of the traditional Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and represents a vital step toward ensuring that sustainability is adequately addressed during the project assessment process.

Lehigh University is exploring the possibility of closing Packer Avenue to traffic and converting it into a pedestrian promenade. In Spring 2019, Lehigh University graduate students conducted an SIA for this potential project. SIAs offer a comprehensive guide for decision-makers by laying out positive and negative impacts of a project as well as recommendations for mitigating negative impacts.

SIAs encourage using assessment tools most appropriate to the stakeholders and the impact being assessed. The Packer Avenue Promenade SIA identifies six key categories for assessment. Methods of assessment were tailored to each category and included literature reviews, interviews with experts and stakeholders, online surveys, and quantitative data collection. Local businesses, restaurants, and arts organizations were also interviewed.

The proposed project may have both positive and negative impacts. Among the most significant are improved aesthetics and prospective student experience, decreased stormwater runoff and greenhouse gas emissions, reduced exposure of students to harmful vehicular emissions, and impacts to accessibility and mobility. Our recommendations include, but are not limited to, addressing potential parking issues at Zoellner Arts Center, implementing bioswales with appropriate vegetation, conducting further traffic studies that include the broader South Side area, appointing an implementation committee that includes non-Lehigh community members, providing alternative accessible transportation options, implementing programming in the new space to improve communal sense of place, and using tactical urbanism to test the road closure for effectiveness and approval before implementing the proposed project.

SIA is a new concept within minimal implementation requirements that provides Lehigh University and the City of Bethlehem the opportunity to be leaders in an emerging policy movement with global implications. Assessing the effects on community, environment, and economic well-being will promote Lehigh University and the City of Bethlehem as leaders in sustainability.