

Banana Factory Expansion (1)

Ed Gallagher, The Bethlehem Gadfly Banana Factory Expansion, Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues September 18, 2018

(first in a series)

Nicole Radzievich, “Banana Factory could be demolished, replaced with larger cultural arts center.” *Morning Call*, September 13, 2018: 1-2.
<http://www.mcall.com/news/local/bethlehem/mc-nws-bethlehem-banana-factory-project-20180911-story.html>

The Banana Factory <http://www.bananafactory.org/>

The Gadfly remembers Theodoredis. The Gadfly remembers “the” banana factory. But the banana factory became the Banana Factory in 1998, “home to ArtsQuest’s visual arts education programs,” including thirty studio artists, three galleries, multiple classrooms, the Pennsylvania Youth Theatre, the Pediatric Cancer Foundation, and Santa Bannon Fine Art. Amazingly, 35,000 to 40,000 people participate in Banana Factory programming each year. The Gadfly has never heard a word less than laudatory about the Banana Factory. It’s a unique asset to the city.

The Gadfly loves the feel of all that creative energy housed in that kind of nondescript complex of six old buildings seemingly wedged into that tight space between West 3rd and what I think of as the No-Name road to Nowhere. So cool. So charming. Such atmosphere. Young life embraced by old buildings. The present housed in the past. The Gadfly loves the idea of it all. Such a wonderful nod to our city’s history.

But the Banana Factory wants to grow, needs to grow, and, after considering various space renovation plans over the last five years, ArtsQuest brought forth a proposal tonight to our Historical Conservation Commission that includes demolition of virtually all of the existing buildings. Demolition, a dirty word. The City Historical Code

does not like terminal cases! The property, remember, is in the Southside Historical District, and ArtsQuest needs approval by this Commission (and eventually City Council) whose job it is to conserve and preserve, though, and I may be wrong, but trying to read the tea leaves, it didn't seem to this Gadfly that the Commission was leaning toward dropping the no-demo hammer.

No decision was made tonight nor was one expected. ArtsQuest was just asking the Commission to, as it were, dance for the first time. The interaction was cordial. Many spoke to support ArtsQuest. But we should put our thinking caps on. Can you imagine a spanking new modern building on that banana graveyard? The curiosity-generating name "Banana Factory" sort of fits the funky character of that block now. (More than one intrigued visitor has asked, "A what!?") Will we lose the name and its funkiness with a spanking new modern building? Won't it have to be called something else? The Gadfly sighs.

The Gadfly hopes that we'll hear from others at the meeting, including ArtsQuest reps, to help us form some preliminary ideas of what to think. Given that two decades of admirable work have made the Banana Factory a respected City institution and given its geographical prominence at the western gateway to the City, the decision is important to all of us.