

“We know our neighbors . . . We’re thrilled” (17)

The Bethlehem Gadfly 2 W. Market St., Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues November 14, 2018

(17th in a series of posts on 2 W. Market St.)

A good 15 neighbors of 2 W. Market stepped up to support the petition. They were in the nature of character witness, both to the owners themselves as well as the quality of workmanship performed on the house.

The very first to speak – Jean Sieman (Gadfly hopes he has the name right) – is representative.

Jean Sieman

“I just want to say that I am pleased and delighted with the improvements that have been made here at 2 W. Market St., and I believe that the occupants of the building will continue to take care of this property. They already have walked the talk. They have been a great neighbor. They have also been a great supporter of Historic Bethlehem museums and sites. And I would love to see them stay. And I ask that you please help to this end.”

The remarks of these supporters were peppered with high praise superlatives. Here are typical sound bites.

- I love and respect my neighbors
- They did an incredible job of improving that property and making it a gorgeous gateway to Market St.
- They did a phenomenal job on the building
- They support local businesses
- I hope they’ll be there for a long time
- It’s a fabulous building
- It’s incredible inside, incredible outside
- I only wish I had a neighbor like this renovating to this fabulous beauty and historic significance
- It’s a job well done
- We’re glad to have you here
- You couldn’t ask for better neighbors
- It’s a joy to watch this magnificent building
- We’re grateful that someone was willing to step up and insure the future of this historic building

- Exemplary job, exemplary building!
- The owners uphold the values we all hold dear
- We were concerned what would happen because of the investment in our home nearby
- Their interest in investment in city is deeply rooted
- They have enhanced the value of the community

Some people deserve more than a soundbite, however:

Suzanne Virgilio

“I’m here to speak very much in favor of what has happened at 2 W. Market . . . We were very concerned [when the house went for sale] . . . You cannot get a residential loan for that property . . . Yeah, it’s a great home. It would be wonderful to have a family live there with lots of kids and I could go over and borrow a cup of sugar, but there’s no yard, it does not offer the amenities that people with children would look for in a house on a busy intersection in a downtown neighborhood. So when Quadrant was in the process and eventually purchased the building, we were thrilled, thrilled because the property could be made into a nursing home [etc.] . . . All of which we were fearing as property owners and as neighbors with children . . . What they have done to improve the property any other city would welcome with open arms . . . It’s magnificent . . . It’s increased our property value, it has increased the integrity of the neighborhood . . . We know our neighbors . . . We’re thrilled . . . We want to see it continue. We know that it will be improved beyond our expectations.”

Claire Rij

“I have heard some things tonight . . . that have been somewhat hurtful to me. I was born on that street . . . I walked that cemetery [with my mother] maybe that’s where my love for Bethlehem came from . . . When my mother died . . . I named the garden building at the Burnside Plantation after her . . . My mother was the one who started the Arts program for the children . . . For years I maintained the garden next to the library . . . I took care of it because my mother loved gardening. I hear people talking about the fact that this building is going to be a turnover. I hope that as a mother I instilled in my daughter Kori . . . the love of Bethlehem. They have lived here all their lives. And I don’t see

them walking away from this . . . They have been part of Bethlehem all their lives . . . The money we put into that building was not because it was an office . . . it had never been updated . . . The dollar price to fix those Green buildings . . . \$400,000. Now if you know somebody who wants to buy a family house with no yard . . . but in addition wants to take on the responsibility of putting \$400,000 into Green buildings so that they can have a commercial entity, please introduce them to me. I don't know what that person is . . . I would be very concerned about that house sitting empty . . . We will leave it."

Robert Virgilio

"[31 years Bed and Breakfast across the street] People thought we were going to create a brothel, they were all misinformed, misunderstood . . . we worked through it . . . underwent tremendous scrutiny . . . got it approved. We didn't run out of town . . . This was on the market when the market was down . . . What more can you ask for? . . . I have skin in the game . . . It's a fantastic use, why roll the dice and see what happens?"

Jason Cort

"Public good . . . common sense . . . I'm not a lawyer . . . we love this neighborhood, we love Bethlehem, we want to be here for a long, long time . . . we want to do what's right by the community . . . to do what's in the best interest of the community . . . we didn't move forward in a reckless manner . . . we delayed multiple years to do it right."

Now we move on to neighbors — less in number but equally as passionate — who spoke against the petition. How's it going for you? What are you thinking?