

Stepping down on 3rd St.?

The Bethlehem Gadfly 14-18 W. 3rd. St. March 26, 2021

🌀 *Latest in a series of posts on 14-18 W. 3rd. St* 🌀

*“We gotta get past the height of the building first.”
developer*

ref: **Another opportunity to apply the “Smith Principles”**
ref: **Is the proposed 14-18 W. 3rd. St. a good addition to our community? Part 1**
ref: **Is the proposed 14-18 W. 3rd. St. a good addition to our community? Part 2**
ref: **We need eyes tonight on a proposed Southside project again**

Gadfly needs to get back to the interesting Historic Conservation Commission March 15 meeting on proposed new building construction (8 stories) at 14-18 W. 3rd St.

The volunteer HCC. Your non-tax dollars at work. Let’s look at how they’re doing for us.

The HCC historic officer set the table for discussion by outlining three issues:

- 1) demolition: necessary? can the existing building be saved?
- 2) the size and scale: 8 stories. The elephant in the room.
- 3) style: fitting in historically

The HCC chair wanted to talk about these issues in order. Logical. No sense talking about the proposed building unless there’s a decision to demolish the existing ones.

See image on the right for a reminder of what’s there.



But the developer wanted to go directly to the height: “We gotta get past the height of the building first.”

Yeah, the issue that bejiggers so much development on the Southside.

Gadfly loves following the argument in such meetings. Gets you to think about how you would respond, what you think about the issue. Join him, willya?

So here’s the HCC historic officer setting out the guidelines for size and scale and opining that 8 stories does not fit. This is the point of reference for all further discussion on this topic.

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The historic officer points out that the guidelines point out that 2-3-4 story buildings are the norm in the district. Deviations to a “large degree . . . seriously impact” the district. Judgment: the applicant’s proposal is “inappropriate.” The historic officer holds up a stop sign!

Here’s the developer’s argument for the large size to go around the stop sign:

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It’s an interesting argument, and one that Gadfly thought of and raised in a previous post. If you are coming off the Hill-to-Hill bridge and onto 3rd St., you would have a view of, say, the blank wall of half the Zest building, which is inappropriate and “less attractive,” the developer says, than if they covered it up with their new building. A new 3-story building according to guidelines would be “less historic,” the developer argues, than what they are proposing.



Enter Commission member Beth Starbuck floating the idea of a “step down” construction of the new building:

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Starbuck addresses a nod to the guidelines, a more appropriate view traveling east on 3rd, and — another good point — avoiding a 220 ft long wall along 3rd St. Yes, a penitentiary-like wall. Gadfly hadn't thought of that last point. Gotta look at this from all sides, Gadfly — right?!

It would go something like this in Gadfly's un-draftsman-like rendering.



Whattya think? Does Starbuck offer a good alternative?