

# **“Where are the Health people?” Gadfly asks at the public meeting on the Martin Tower demolition (50)**

The Bethlehem Gadfly Martin Tower, Serious Issues May 11, 2019

*(50th in a series on Martin Tower)*

*Martin Tower demolition May 19*

[www.martintowerbethlehem.com](http://www.martintowerbethlehem.com)

Gadfly’s focus — spurred by follower concerns — has been on the health and environmental effects of implosions.

Gadfly learned that Martin Romeril (audio posts #19 and #38), Nalyn Marcus (post #34), Barbara Diamond (post #23), and others had been trying to get information about the demolition to no avail. Nalyn, for instance, reported a few posts back that she had been trying for 8 weeks to get information. 8 weeks! After promising an update by mid-April, you might remember or noticed, the City information web site went dark.

Public anxiety is captured well in this email sent to Gadfly: “My father lives at 1102 Eaton Ave, Bethlehem. He turns 92 years old tomorrow. The apartment building that he lives in is located directly across the street from the Martin Towers. I am very concerned for his health and well-being along with all of the other residents at that location, as they are all elderly. My dad has breathing issues. What is being done to remove those residents for the duration of this implosion? They’ve been told to cover their air vents. How does that prevent particulates from coming in through the door? It’s an old building, there are other ways

the dust and asbestos could get in. Regardless, of the abatement, potentially there will be particulates and dust that will get into this building. Also, what if it causes breaks in the building from the implosion and other issues, such as water pipe or gas pipe breaks? Obviously, there is concern that this implosion could not go as planned as there are going to be ambulances and emergency services standing by. So, rather than wait to see if someone is affected, why not ensure these people are taken elsewhere for the event? I think they should be given an alternative location until the air quality and the building are deemed safe. Please advise me as to what is being done.”

Gadfly formulated a long list of questions into a “Letter to the City” (post #32 in this series) and got a few minutes to “depose” reps from the developer and demolitioner at the afternoon meeting for stakeholders last Thursday May 9. He hopes you listened to the audio of his interchange in post #49.

But what to ask and/or talk about at the general meeting for the public in the evening? He didn’t want — and there wouldn’t be audience patience for — a lot of “in the weeds” kind of questions, so he tried to think about his one most important and major concern.

Thus, Gadfly decided to focus on the lack of an authoritative Health Department (City or State) voice in the discussion to address health concerns, especially long-term health concerns.

This seemed such a glaring omission.

Once again, please listen to the audio, go to the source — and think for yourself.

Only 8 minutes this time.

## AUDIO RECORDINGS UNAVAILABLE IN THIS ARCHIVE

“Is there a health person here?” Gadfly asked right out of the gate. Bethlehem Health Director Kristen Weinrich was not among the 13 officials at the Head Table but sitting in the front row. Gadfly said he would feel comfortable if a health official said the implosion was ok health-wise, pointing out that the people answering the health questions were the developer and the demolitioner, “people making money” off the project and with no health credentials: “I want to hear from a health person.” Gadfly pointed out that the developer claim that they’ve done 18 months of work without a complaint was weak since the kind of health problems we’re worried about don’t show up for years, for decades, and even the most cursory survey of the web would show that silica dust (in concrete) causes cancer and silicosis. (The earlier scene of our resident forensic pathologist making his case to a business man struck Gadfly as completely absurd.) Gadfly wanted a health person to point to the studies that make sense of all this. Can we have the evidence from Phila. studies that were referenced, he asked? The demolitioner assumed that Gadfly was advocating for conventional demolition — not so — just advocating for assurance about health safety. Gadfly cited an online source that said implosion is cheaper but has more health hazard than other types of demolition and the need for a trusted health professional to decide whether that’s true. Gadfly pointed out that other cities clearly advise “Stay inside,” and the City replied that that was their message (Gadfly would say it’s not strong enough).

In what he thought would be conclusion, Gadfly ended (to a smattering of applause), asking “Where are the Health people?”

But then it got pretty interesting. The response was that the City Health Director was in the front row, to which Gadfly asked why she wasn’t at the Head Table — and a response to that was that there were not enough seats. *Grrrrr*. If she was thought important, enough seats would certainly

have been provided. And, in fact, it was not necessary for the City Business Manager and the demolition assistant to take space at the Head Table. They certainly had no higher priority than City Health Director.

In Gadfly's opinion, the City Health Director should have had a forefront role. No question.

But Gadfly's question did flush out the Health Director Kristen Weinrich to make — off the cuff — what he called in post #42 a position statement. Here it is again:

“The Health Department does not regularly get involved with air quality issues . . . but in looking at long-term health outcomes due to dust, you are looking at direction, long-term exposure, and you're looking at quantity. So that everything I've been told and everything I've seen, they've done everything that they can to minimize [garbled audio]. It's a short-term event, they're not expecting any type of long-term exposure, and we're not expecting [garbled audio] amount of dust. So that's my opinion from a public health standpoint.”

Now we can agree or disagree, but here at least and at last is the kind of statement that Gadfly felt that we needed from the beginning.

The City Health Director does not say that there will be no long-term health problems from the implosion but that the demolitioners are doing all they can to minimize exposure, which will be to only small amounts of dust for a short time.

She went on to say that she was concerned about short-term outcomes for those with respiratory diseases.

Gadfly does not understand why the Health Director did not have a central role.

Gadfly does not understand why the Health Director had to be flushed out to make statement.

*Chew on this too, and there will be more to follow.*