

A Northside Commuter Lot for Lehigh U? Let's make sure fairness is in play (19)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Gadfly's posts, Lehigh University, Serious Issues March 9, 2019

(19th in a series of posts on Lehigh University)

This is the 3rd email in Gadfly's recent conversation with the involved Lehigh and City parties over this puzzling issue of Lehigh's "Northside Commuter Lot" and its possible negative effect on lower-paid Bethlehem residents and taxpayers who work at Lehigh.

Saturday, March 9

Brent, Darlene, and members of the Planning Commission (except Ms. Cohen, for whom I do not have a permissible email)

Take #3

There is a discrepancy here. The most obvious reason is that Lehigh has in some fashion (not a lease) made arrangement to use the Bethlehem Parking Authority Lot, discussed it openly with Lehigh employees as an option in their new parking plan, but not told the City, since Ms. Heller has no knowledge of it. But there are other possible interpretations as well.

My suggestion would be that the Planning Commission revoke its 2/21 approval till Lehigh explains the discrepancy, at which time the possible impact of bumping or forcing lower-wage Bethlehem residents, taxpayers, and voters into the Northside lot may be explored fully. There may be no problem, but let's be sure.

The College of Health at 124 E. Morton is a major undertaking and a great additional distinction for the University and the City. The Mayor just highlighted it in Thursday's "State of the City" address.

That new College and fair practices for lower-wage Bethlehem residents and taxpayers are not incompatible. Let's just pause and make sure fairness is in play.

Here is evidence to consider—

Direct quotes from recording of the 2/21 Planning Commission mtg:

1) The Lehigh lawyer (so sorry, I don't have her name): "[Lehigh has done] a study to prove and confirm to the city that with all these projects that would be coming both proposed now and what may be coming in the future that there's adequate parking throughout the campus based on the zoning ordinance requirements. That is public record here at the City, so whether Mr. Gallagher took the opportunity to review that, I don't know. The lot that he's talking about that there be a lease of some City lot does not exist, so the comments about lower income, lower whatever he's trying to describe parking in that lot, there is no leasing of that City lot. And that is not even part of the parking study. The parking study took into account existing projects as well as the projects proposed. . . . There is no leasing of the lot with the City. All I can say is the lot you are claiming Lehigh is leasing is not under lease. . . . It's not in the Comprehensive Plan. It's not in the plan the City reviewed."

2) Darlene Heller, Bethlehem Director, Planning and Zoning: "So that there will be some satellite parking spaces, none that I know of on the northside. . . ."

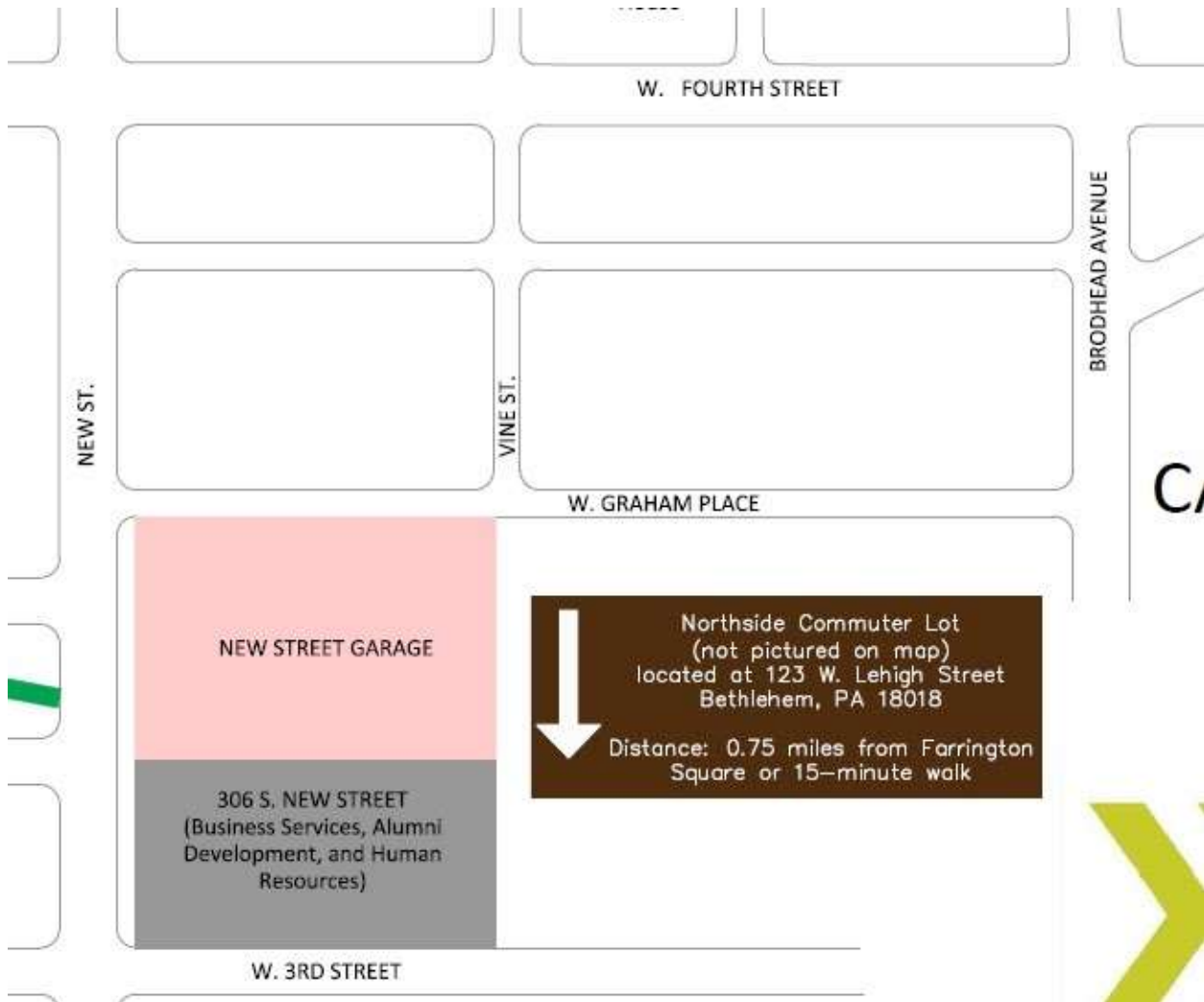
From the Lehigh Parking Study referenced above:

1) "The commuter lot is located on Goodman Campus [over the Mountain, Stabler Arena locale] with frequent bus service." (32)

2) "Lehigh University intends to make use of off-site parking as an option for non-residential students at the Goodman Commuter lot." (41)

From Lehigh U material on web site Sept 2018 and used as basis for widespread campus discussion throughout the Fall:

— see the attached image from the Campus Parking Map from the Lehigh U parking regulations document showing notation for Northside (other areas in the documentation reference bus service from the Northside lot to Farrington Square)



From personal conversation with a score of current Lehigh employees on Friday:

— everybody I talked with is aware of the Northside Commuter Lot in the mix of parking locations in the new plan

Assoc. VP Stringfellow and other Lehigh reps perhaps closer to implementation details of the parking plan than the Lehigh lawyer were present 2/21 but did not participate in discussion, though led to do so by Ms. Heller. Stringfellow is signator to the Sept 10, 2018, document that was circulated on campus that is the basis for my concern.

Ed Gallagher