

Please sign letter supporting proposal to regulate student housing

The Bethlehem Gadfly [Neighborhoods, Southside](#) October 21, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts on the Southside 

Community Development Committee meeting

Thursday, October 22, 6PM

[view on YouTube](#)

call-in number: (610) 997-7963

[sign this supporting letter here](#)

ref: [“Important meeting Thursday on regulating student housing to protect Southside neighborhood”](#)

ref: [“Here’s how everybody can help protect the Southside neighborhood”](#)

ref: [“More information on the proposal to regulate student housing”](#)

Gadfly, who has supported encroachments on the quality of life in neighborhoods several times in his buzzing lifetime — perhaps your very own neighborhood — asks cooperation from residents across the city in [signing the letter](#) below seeking City Council support for student housing regulation at the Community Development Committee meeting Thursday night.

The issue of Lehigh sprawl is hardly new to Gadfly followers. And here we have an eminently reasonable proposal supported and developed by the City Administration and already approved by the Planning Commission and Zoning Board.

All it needs now is City Council approval.

Here’s [overview information](#) that will fill you in completely.

Please click on [this link](#) to sign the letter below to show your support for this important safeguard to a Bethlehem neighborhood.

City Council: Support the Regulation of Student Housing in Bethlehem

Dear Bethlehem City Council Members:

We live, work, and/or spend our free time in the vibrant, diverse neighborhoods of South Bethlehem. We are familiar with the multiple faces of this unique community, and we believe that the community's identity as a place where all are welcome, and where all can establish a social and economic foothold, is key to South Bethlehem's past and future. Southside neighborhoods are home to former steelworkers, young immigrant families, college professors, transitional and cooperative housing program residents, college students, and young professionals. At this critical moment in our nation's history, the diversity of residents in Southside neighborhoods and the intentional and informal interactions that occur between those residents shine a light on what can make a community strong and resilient, fostering mutual understanding and cross-cultural dialogue.

Over the last four years, residents and community leaders have identified a disruption in the equilibrium that has kept our neighborhoods diverse. The rapid extension of student housing into neighborhoods further from Lehigh University's borders has placed several of the Southside's diverse neighborhoods at risk of being converted to exclusively student areas. Student housing companies are purchasing homes at inflated prices, and some intend to demolish existing housing stock to build luxury student accommodations. Residents have experienced the negative impacts of this spike in investment activity. Some low-income families have been forced to leave rental homes to make way for students; long-term renters and homeowners have fled and others are thinking of following them, and prospective residents struggle to find homes to purchase or rent.

Like most communities in the Lehigh Valley, South Bethlehem has a shortage of affordable housing, and the need for it among our families is clear: 93% of students at Broughal Middle School receive free and reduced lunch. While low-income families have historically had a better chance of finding housing in South Bethlehem, 70% of Southside families currently rent their homes, at rates up to five times lower than rental prices for college students. Without deliberate intervention to regulate the expansion of student housing beyond a designated zone, the

affordability, as well as general livability of Southside neighborhoods is at risk.

Although college students in South Bethlehem serve as tutors in local schools, patronize local businesses, and may become permanent residents of our city following graduation, they have very different schedules, social lives, and levels of commitment to their adopted neighborhoods. Maintaining a balance between students and long-term residents helps to foster positive community relationships in neighborhoods beyond the immediate campus borders. By establishing a designated area for any new student housing, our community can ensure that students have safe, well-located residences while maintaining rental and homeownership opportunities and livable neighborhoods for families of all income levels.

We ask you to protect the livability of South Bethlehem's neighborhoods by supporting Mayor Donchez's proposal to create a Student Housing Overlay District in south Bethlehem and place common-sense regulations on college student housing in our city. Please act now to preserve and strengthen our diverse Southside community and ensure that safe, affordable housing and stable neighborhoods remain accessible to all.

[sign this supporting letter here](#)