

# South Bethlehem Planning Study: “a proactive response . . . the answer to my prayers”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Neighborhoods, Southside November 7, 2019

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Southside* 

**City Council meeting, Nov 6, 2019, part 2**

**mins. 1:01:22 – 1:30:35**

So what’s this South Bethlehem Planning Study all about?

The proposal sayeth its purpose is to “review current planning and zoning policies and ordinances in South Bethlehem and provide recommendations for revisions to address compatibility between new development and historic district ordinances and policies.”

In her interaction with Councilman Callahan the City Planning Director elaborated on that purpose in these ways: the study is an attempt “to answer some new questions for us about that type of development that we’re seeing in the Southside. Do our current ordinances and policies really support our goals and objectives? . . . how to balance demand for historic preservation and development.”

The PD spoke of anticipating future development, how to make development more compatible with surrounding areas, pointing out that some of our most liberal zoning is around historical districts, referencing in general some recent “challenging projects,” and indicating it would be helpful for developers to know exactly what we want.

Balancing historical preservation and development — O, Yeah!

Go down Memory Lane with Gadfly.

Remember the impact on Gadfly when at the City Council meeting May 22, Louis James, President of the [South Bethlehem Historical Society](#), presented this polite but forceful letter to the Mayor and City Council in a likewise polite but forceful manner.

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P.O. Box 5106 ~ Bethlehem PA 18015

Mayor Robert Donchez and Bethlehem City Council  
City of Bethlehem  
10 East Church St.  
Bethlehem, PA 18018

May 22, 2019

Mayor Donchez & Members of City Council:

Over the last several years Bethlehem has experienced much growth. With the construction of the Sands Casino and the entertainment venue of Steel Stacks, particularly, South Bethlehem has become a destination spot for many of our own citizens and those from out of the area and even the state. This has enabled the name and history of Bethlehem and Bethlehem Steel to be preserved for future generations and as a reminder of our small part in the building of this country, our participation in two world wars.

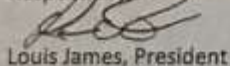
More recently the many construction projects along 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, the expansion of Lehigh University, the closing of many churches, the closing and changes to streets, as well as the demolition of many historic homes, businesses and neighborhoods is changing the historic character of the Southside. The building of luxury apartments and condominiums is also having its effect on the residents of the Southside as the economic impact of this progress is making it difficult for some to find affordable housing.

The purpose of the South Bethlehem Historical Society is to preserve and make known the Second Chapter of Bethlehem's History (1850 – on) by focusing on the individuals, ethnic groups and material evidence which helped make possible the industrialization of South Bethlehem.

The Board of the South Bethlehem Historical Society writes not to stand in the way of progress, but to remind you of the History of South Bethlehem. We write to implore you to consider the economic impacts progress has on the residents of South Bethlehem and the changes to the character of the neighborhoods, which are still as vibrant and diverse as they were when many of our parents, grandparents and great grandparents made their homes here. A developer said once at a council meeting "...in 10 years you will not recognize South Bethlehem..." This statement is rapidly becoming the reality.

We ask you honorable Mayor and City and Council Members, to consider the history that is being destroyed in the name of progress. Consider the economic impact progress is having on residents of the Southside and also to consider the construction projects that have taken place and will continue. Ask yourselves about the history of the architecture that is being demolished and if the new plans reflect the importance and beauty of what South Bethlehem was and continues to be.

Respectfully,



Louis James, President  
and Board of South Bethlehem Historical Society

This letter hit Gadfly hard, he did a series of responses to the letter, and he has reprinted it several times since May 22, lest we forget.

Councilwoman Negron made an unusually long response of her own to that SBHS letter at the following Council meeting [that Gadfly found very moving](#).

Go to min. 1:48:41 on the video.

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPlqRE9oJCM>

It was this letter — the plea in this letter — that Gadfly thought of when he understood the purpose of the proposed South Bethlehem Planning Study.

Gadfly criticized the Mayor for a soft response to this SBHS letter, but he now wonders if that letter is at least partly behind the City's proposal for this study. For instance, Gadfly remembers Councilwoman Negron later alluding happily to a productive subsequent meeting with City officials and Southside people that she attended on this very subject.

In last night's meeting, Councilman Reynolds indicated that the balance between development and historical preservation is “a question that a lot of people are talking about” — and that we need a “blueprint.”

Last night, memorably, Councilwoman Negron referred to this proposed study as “a proactive response” to her concerns, “the answer to my prayers.”

So what's the beef?