

Lehigh presents its Packer Ave. proposal a second time

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [Lehigh University, Southside](#) February 11, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about Lehigh University and the Southside* 

Lehigh University is asking the City to consider closing Packer Ave. between Vine and Webster. As part of the decision-making process, Lehigh is proposing a 45-day closure of that section of Packer beginning March 9 to test the impact on traffic.

Lehigh hosted a “community meeting” January 23 at Broughal Middle School and made a presentation at Council February 4. Council will vote March 3 on whether to enable the temporary street closing necessary to conduct the traffic study. The results of the study will be presented to the Mayor as part of his deliberation process. The Mayor has stated firmly that he has made no decision yet. If he decides after the traffic study to approve the road closure, Council will make the final determination.

Gadfly has [posted over 30 times](#) about this proposal, the last time [“demanding that Lehigh make a strong case for closing Packer Ave.”](#) “Demanding”! Your Gadfly is so pompous, isn’t he!

Gadfly spoke at City Council February 4, asking that Council withhold permission on March 3 to do the traffic study until Lehigh made a strong case for closing Packer Ave. Listen:

Audio Player not available in this archive

Why is Gadfly’s underwear so tight about this proposal?

As a historian, he is aware of Lehigh sprawl, aware of the bones of the lost neighborhood on which the north-Packer Lehigh campus rests. And he sees no sign that the current *Bethlehem* community surrounding Lehigh has been much involved in deliberations. Gadfly is a *community* man, a *neighborhood* man.

As a rhetoric teacher, he is allergic to decisions made on weak, soft, slipshod argument. He wants compelling argument. He wants mental rigor. He wants facts. He wants specifics. He wants to be persuaded. Packer Ave.'s been around since 1891. It's a busy, beautiful, healthy street. It's not the kind of derelict street that has been the subject of other street vacations Gadfly has seen during his tenure in office.

Gadfly is not *demanding* that Council completely reject the street closing. He's asking they *demand* Lehigh make a compelling case. A case that compels them.

Gadfly is not against closing Packer Ave., far from it. He knows Lehigh would give us a masterpiece of a Packer Promenade. But he is afraid the Mayor may be in a political box. His goal of blurring the lines of campus and city is a good one. But simply because Lehigh can tick off its move into the Flatiron building and on to 3rd St, its funding of the Ambassadors and code enforcement officers, its aid in the development of New St. doesn't make closing Packer Ave. a good idea. But it makes it a difficult idea about which the Mayor can say no if he wanted to.

To paraphrase a maxim from the legal world, if I were Lehigh I wouldn't conduct a study I didn't know the conclusion of.

Will the Mayor be able to say no (if he wants to) in this instance to the largest employer in the city, to an institution that brings the city national renown, and which is doing certifiable good for the City in other areas that align with the Mayor's goals?

Say *no*? Even if he wants to. Gadfly doesn't think so. And the Mayor may not want to.

A no is going to be hard for both the Mayor and Council. I think the answer is a foregone conclusion. I think the Mayor will recommend closing Packer Ave. after the traffic study. I think the decision will come to Council.

Gadfly would like mental rigor not political calculation or emotional beneficence to be guiding the decision.

It just so happens that a Lehigh contingent was in attendance at Council February 4 and made a presentation immediately after the Gadfly.

What timing!

<https://youtu.be/Ddn6LfJMeA4>

Gadfly thinks the “show me” and slow down approach Gadfly took surprised Lehigh. They apparently are not Gadfly readers (not everybody in town reads Gadfly. Not yet, anyway) and seemed unaware of his questioning. They did not alter their calm, descriptive approach even after hearing Gadfly challenge them to make a stronger case.

Listen to their presentation, and we'll talk about it next time.

to be continued . . .