

Martin Tower: “Please, City of Bethlehem, make this a jewel” (15)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Gadfly's posts, Martin Tower, Serious Issues April 15, 2019

(15th in a series on Martin Tower)

Martin Tower demolition May 19

www.martintowerbethlehem.com

We come now to Gadfly's favorite part of the Martin Tower marathon postings.

Public comment.

Followers might remember that one motivation for the Gadfly project is to more widely distribute and archive public commentary.

When he began attending City meetings in January 2018, one of the first things that struck him was the high quality of public comments.

And how much of a shame it was that such good commentary simply disappeared into the Town Hall ceiling.

Gadfly loves to hear “the people” talk, and he hopes that the Gadfly blog will even encourage more such commentary.

The hour and more of public commentary at the Planning Commission last week more than met Gadfly's high expectations.

And the nature of the commentary was different than it was four years ago in 2015 (as examined a few posts back) – even the Planning Commission chair made a big point of that. Only one comment referenced the dreaded creation of a “3rd downtown” that was so much on people's minds – especially the merchants – at that time.

Not at all surprising, the public commentary this time criticized details of the Master Plan: the size-location-nature of the park, the shamelessly low percentage of open space, the lack of diverse housing, subdividing the property, lack of solar, light pollution, potential gridlock, location of the hotel, parking, the destination of our tax dollars, the mysterious owner, and so forth.

But surprising, pleasantly surprising, was the concerted attack on the quality of the Master Plan. Our commentators to a person wanted the absolute best design and didn't find it here.

The Master Plan was dull, unimaginative, routine, lacking creativity – the work of an engineer not a planner, much less an artist.

Speakers found the plan underwhelming, something only someone with a Franklinian penchant for right angles could love.

The plan was rather vanilla, with a Levittown look, and better could be found in introductory College design courses.

The Martin Tower site is a gem, a jewel, an icon – it is unique – nothing these people saw in the design rose to the transcendent level it deserves – and which the City must have.

Why not a public market? Why not a big park? Why not a central park/fountain with the iconic I-beam?

Where is the root in the Bethlehem Comprehensive Plan? Have they not heard of the Bethlehem Climate Action Plan? No evidence of either.

So the developer's Master Plan meets the technical requirements – ok, but ho-hum – can't we expect more than that!

What here is to be really proud of?

People were asking for more than just technical competence and increased tax dollars.

They yearned for a design that matched their exalted sense of their hometown.

They wanted excitement. They wanted to be enthused – “turned on”!

They wanted something to love.

There was not enough “spark.”

Simply good enough is not good enough.

Strong stuff!

Our people were demanding imagination, creativity, specialness, excellence. They worried that the City would just “settle” with what was presented.

This could be an icon to the future.

There's more than a hint of desperation in this haunting plea:

“Please, City of Bethlehem, make this a jewel, not another missed opportunity.”



Looking at that pocket park, it's like in the pocket, it's like something you might forget . . . having something centralized, having something with more of a focus on it would be a better served opportunity for this site. (Brian Hillard)

Disappointed that there is no opportunity for owner-occupied housing. (Dana Grubb)

We are concerned about the effect of so many people in such close proximity to the Burnside Plantation. (Charlene Donchez

Mowers)

I'm certainly underwhelmed currently by what's proposed here. (Diane Backus)



Don't rush to say let's just get this thing over with. (Edward Deluva)

CRIZ is 53 acres, now imploding the 5-acre asset the CRIZ was designed to preserve. 48 acres should be returned to the state. (Bruce Haines proxy)

I've seen plans like this submitted by Lehigh students in my office when they were just starting out in some kind of urban design program at Lehigh, their plans were better than this. (Mike Topping)

Missing individuality and some of the precepts of modern planning. (Steve Melnick)

You never mentioned the Bethlehem Comprehensive Plan. (Steven Glickman)



The plan is a design only Ben Franklin would love . . . straight lines are not friendly. (Diane Backus)

Mr. Herrick is a multi-billionaire, owning over 5 billion dollars of real estate, thoroughbred horses, he owns companies doing movies and Broadway shows, he owns athletic groups and a massive art collection. Now with a background like that . . . crying poverty in terms of getting rid

of asbestos. (Stephen Antalics)

I would encourage us to seek out development of that property in a remarkable way to really make something the City will be proud of just as what Bethlehem Steel had done for this City and this Valley and the world. (Edward Deluva)

Who's going to enjoy the space [of the park] – facing the thruway? (Diane Backus)

What we've heard so far is this plan meets the ordinance, this plan is good enough, but good enough is not good enough for this piece of land, and good enough is not good enough for Bethlehem. (Paige Van Wirt)



The idea of subdividing this land is a mistake. (Mike Topping)

Why is there no low-income housing? (Diane Backus)

On social media the gas station has been panned big time. (Dana Grubb)

Mixed use does not mean housing over here, and office over there. That is not how cities grow. That is how developers generally think. (Steven Glickman)



The lack of a major corporate tenant is a huge disappointment. (Bruce Haines proxy)

The man said it meets requirements – is that the best we get? (Diane Backus)

I think it's incumbent upon the City to follow these policies [e.g., the Climate Action Plan]. (Edward Deluva)

This site was an icon to our city and our region, and we would be well served to continue with that thought. This could be an icon to the future as we remove the icon from the past. (Brian Hillard)



A park there only to meet the requirements of the ordinance not to become useful not necessarily to become useful to the people who are living there. (Steve Melnick)

This was drawn by an engineer who had a straight edge and a scale, and that's about it. (Mike Topping)

The open space percentage is a shame, an absolute shame.

(Diane Backus)

Where is the park? I don't see the park. (Anon.)

This is a rather vanilla development plan. (Charlene Donchez Mowers)

Why the deception? Why the misrepresentation? . . . So in essence Mr. Herrick owns 62.5% of Martin Towers. Has anyone here ever heard or seen of Mr. Herrick? So where will the profits be going? . . . That site is in a CRIZ zone that will get developmental help by tax dollars, tax dollars generated by citizens of Bethlehem and the state of



Pennsylvania. (Stephen Antalics)

Why is the hotel not on the street where there is the most traffic and visibility? (Steve Melnick)

I think it would speak very well for these developers if they understood how valuable that remaining land is for the City and to give it back to the City to determine where is the best place for it to be used not by a private entity. I'm speaking to you guys, and I'm hoping you will take that into consideration as a good faith gesture to the City. (Paige Van Wirt)

A pocket park – why not a big park? (Diane Backus)



There's something here that is truly unique . . . and to just settle for something good is not good enough. (Edward Deluva)

Disappointed that we're not providing housing for all social and economic strata . . . almost every development that comes in nowadays is upscale rental, and gentrification is a real

issue. (Dana Grubb)

Why not a public market like Easton has? (Diane Backus)

Competitive disadvantage over the existing hotels and draws customers away from downtown shops and restaurants. (Bruce Haines proxy)



Sort of the look of Levittown coming to Bethlehem, and that is not what Bethlehem planning has been about. (Mike Topping)

Hire a planner not an engineer and develop your plan using the goals and guidelines outlined in the Comprehensive Plan.

(Steven Glickman)

Where are the solar roofs? Where are the grass roofs? (Diane Backus)

If this is only using 5 acres of the CRIZ, my overriding question is what is going to happen to that very valuable remaining CRIZ land? (Paige Van Wirt)

This is truly a gem project. . . . It's incumbent upon the City to take a really hard look at this. (Edward Deluva)

Light pollution is [will be] real [for people in the townhouses]. (Steve Melnick)



Is it fair for a multi-billionaire to take Pennsylvania tax dollars with no interest and redeveloping down in Florida? (Stephen Antalics)

Going to be a fair amount of gridlock. (Steve Melnick)

Please, City of Bethlehem, make this a jewel, not another missed opportunity. (Diane Backus)



Eaton Ave. north

1 – medical	8 – Offices	9 – 528 apartments, 3 stories
2 – medical	7 – Hotel (132 rooms)	1-2 bedroom
3 – retail	6 – Restaurant	pocket park at bottom
4 – gas/convenience	5 – Retail	

Rt. 378 south