

# New development in the City: there is a difference between “anything goes” and thoughtful planning

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*(First in a 4-part series of posts on thoughtful planning by Kim Carrell-Smith)*

*Kim Carrell-Smith is a 31-year resident of Bethlehem’s historic Southside, where she taught public history at Lehigh University for almost two decades. She is also an aspiring gadfly, buzzing in on issues of historic preservation, public education, city government, and other social justice issues. She tips her wings to the master gadflies who have served our community for so long!*

Gadfly: As so many residents, city officials and business folks have noted, new development can be good for the city, and is necessary for our tax base. But a few of us have added a caveat: there is a difference between “anything goes” and thoughtful planning. The future of our city should be based on sound practice that considers the latest data and research.

Is there a sound alternative development vision to the glitz, glass, mass, and height typical of new project proposals that have been announced lately in Bethlehem? As the [\*Infill Development Standards and Policy Guide\*](#) (developed for the state of NJ by the Rutgers Center for Urban Policy Research and the University of MD's National Center for Smart Growth and Education) has noted, successful infill projects in cities should be "context-sensitive."

The context in Bethlehem is HISTORICAL.

So, could preserving the historical ambiance and human scale of our city — while pursuing creative development and redevelopment projects— also bring value, tax money, jobs, feet on the street, new businesses, tourists, and increased property values to Bethlehem? The answer is yes, and there is plenty of evidence to support that.

If you can hang on for the ride, I can introduce you to a raft of studies, first via one hyperlink (that list ought to keep everyone out of trouble for a few days). But after that I promise to discuss the highlights of two studies that are particularly applicable to the current development climate in Bethlehem.

Want LOTS of state, local, and regional evidence? Stick with me; this shouldn't be too painful. Just one link first.

[This](#) is a hyperlinked list of studies from 28 states, 12 cities, and a few National Heritage Areas (like our D&L) which all examined the impact of historic preservation on the local economy. The information in these studies is based on solid data and good research done by professional planners, data and policy analysts, and academics (urban planners, business professors, economists), and lawyers, most of whom belonged to two different top teams of consultants: one firm was the highly regarded real estate and economic development firm PlaceEconomics,

and the other consulting group was the equally well known Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers.

- The vast majority of these studies indicate that maintaining the historical integrity of cities can and does enhance property values, creates jobs, expands the tax base, attracts visitors and/or new residents, and puts “feet on the street.” Each city, state, or regional study provides strong evidence for such assertions.

So there IS an alternative way of thinking about “progress!” I promise fewer studies, but fascinating findings, in the next installment . . .

Kim

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