

# “Going to 5-6 stories definitely wouldn’t work”

The Bethlehem Gadfly 319-327 S. New, Development, Southside February 21, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts on 319-327 S. New St.* 

ref: **Another developer thinking big . . . er, tall**

ref: **The HCC discusses the proposal for 319-327 S. New**

ref: **“The current proposal for a 12-story structure is inappropriate”**

ref: **“What we have in front of us is going to be a big stretch for us”**

With a focus on developer arguments now, we can finish our examination of the proposal for a 12-story building on the Southside presented to the Historical Conservation Commission January 25.

It’s valuable that we have a grip on the issues for this controversial project since it is again on the agenda for tomorrow’s meeting of the HCC, where, perhaps, a vote will be taken.



Remember that chair Gary Lader called the proposal a “big stretch” for the HCC.

Indeed, for all of the Commissioners who spoke, the 12-story height of the building was a stab in the heart of the proposal.

How did the developer respond?

As you might expect, the developer shied away from the subject of height as much as possible in making his pitch and answering questions, though he did eventually clearly say “going to 5-6 stories definitely wouldn’t work.” Here is a climactic interchange between the developer and HCC

chair Lader. Lader seems to suggest to the developer that in further discussion, in order to better make his case, he might talk of height in relation to the Zest building across the street and talk in terms of feet rather than stories.

Instead of focusing on the problem of the height, the developer stresses:

- other decisions such as the tall building approved at 4th and Vine
- they'll save the facade of 321-323 (but not the inside of the building)
- that the apartments will include affordable housing (details not specified)
- they've already modified the height from a previous higher height design (nothing specific)
- that it's a great design, appropriate for the area, *for the future* (not specified — is this a look away from history?)
- if you want to keep things as is, that's up to you (ironic to say that in front of an "historic" body — is this a denigration of history?)
- that there have been multiple meetings with the Mayor and DCED
- they're doing stuff for the community, for the Greenway
- they have passion, they've worked hard

Gadfly can see that economics — which, remember, is not the purview of this committee — is the elephant in the room. The building will plunk lots of people smack on the New St. corridor, and the Food Court has the potential for creating a lot of energy, a lot of vibrancy in what the food guy implies is a sleepy Southside. Listen to the developer and his food guy in full court press mode throwing everything but the kitchen sink into their case for their project. "Everything is spot on," says the developer with wonderful understatement, "except for the height a little bit."

All good except for the height.

In the only "public" comment at the meeting, Missy Hartney — much respected head of the Southside Arts District — positively drooled at the economic security and stability that infusion of new bodies, patrons of business on the Southside would provide.

A compelling point, thought the Gadfly.

Ok, understand the positions?

The ball is in the developer's court.

They will return with design revisions and/or arguments to sway the committee at the Zoom meeting tomorrow Monday February 22.

What's in your mind so far?

**The Bethlehem Gadfly**