

More information on the proposal to regulate student housing on the Southside and a request for your help

The Bethlehem Gadfly Neighborhoods, Southside October 20, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on the Southside* 

“Although [Lehigh] student housing has been a part of the [Southside] community for a long time, and will always be a part of it, the events of the last few years have shifted the balance and left long-time residents concerned about losing their family-oriented neighborhoods completely, as families are forced to look elsewhere.”

Regulating student housing

Community Development Committee meeting

Thursday, October 22, 6PM

[view on YouTube](#)

call-in number: (610) 997-7963

Yesterday Anna Smith alerted us to an important meeting of the City Council Community Development Committee (Paige Van Wirt, chair, J. William Reynolds, and Grace Crampsie Smith) to discuss a long-standing concern — the regulation of student housing on the Southside around Lehigh University.

A proposal supported by the City Administration and approved by the Zoning Board and the Planning Commission is working its way to the last stop — City Council.

Just one more approval is needed.

Anna has provided us with this wonderful document that provides background on the problem caused by unregulated student housing, a

summary of the proposed regulations, a statement of the value of the ordinance, and answers to frequently asked questions. Here's all you need to know:

Overview of Student Housing Ordinance (1)

Gadfly supposes his followers are well aware of the present housing situation around Lehigh as well as the historical tension between the University and the surrounding neighborhoods. But here is part of the background section of the above linked overview document that Anna provided for us.

In 2018, community members and City staff identified a series of data points and resident anecdotes that indicated a major shift in the student housing market in south Bethlehem. In a single year, residential property sales were up 34% near Lehigh's campus, sales prices were up 18%, and the percentage of new owner-occupiers was extremely low. We heard stories from neighborhoods that had previously housed only a handful of student homes for the last decade, but where out of state buyers were going door to door, attempting to convince homeowners that all their neighbors had already sold and that their homes would soon lose their value due to major student housing developments planned for the neighborhood. Realtors were emphasizing news of Lehigh's expansion and encouraging investors to look far beyond the traditional boundaries of student neighborhoods. Although student housing has been a part of the community for a long time, and will always be a part of it, the events of the last few years have shifted the balance and left long-time residents concerned about losing their family-oriented neighborhoods completely, as families are forced to look elsewhere.

A group of concerned Southside residents got together to discuss the future of our neighborhoods, and with support from the City and Southside Vision, hired an expert on housing policy from the University of Pennsylvania to analyze policies and practices that other college communities have used to preserve mixed-income neighborhoods while providing for the necessary amount of off-campus housing.

This proposal to regulate student housing needs visible signs of significant public support to push it over the last hump.

Following Anna's lead, Gadfly suggests that you:

- speak at the October 22nd Community Development Committee meeting in support of the proposal: you can sign up in advance or call (610) 997-7963 when the chair asks for public comment. If you would like to sign up to speak, email the following information to the Bethlehem City Clerk's office (cityclerk@bethlehem-pa.gov) no later than 2:00 PM on October 22, 2020 (a) name; (b) address; (c) phone number; and (d) topic of comments. If you are signed up to speak, the Committee Chair will call you from (610) 997-7963.

and/or

- add your name to a letter to Council from affordable housing advocates throughout our community: [CLICK HERE](#) to read and sign.

The Bethlehem Gadfly