

Lehigh on the Northside (1)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Gadfly's posts, Lehigh University, Serious Issues October 5, 2018

(1st in a series of posts on Lehigh University)

Path to Prominence

Connections: A New Mobility Ecosystem

Parking and Transportation Impacts and Plan for Faculty and Staff

[2018.09.10 Lehigh Parking Staff and Faculty Announcement \(1\)](#)

[Jacqueline Palochko. "As part of major expansion plan, Lehigh University sets 2020 date for new college." *Morning Call*, January 9, 2018.](#)

Lehigh University is on the move! Literally as well as figuratively. Over the next several years, Lehigh will be adding 1500 students (the current student body is about 7000), 200 faculty and staff, and a new college (the College of Health) as part of an ambitious "Path to Prominence" aimed at moving the university to the next step in intellectual stature and national reputation.

Gadfly knows that many of you driving around town have shared with him a bit of awe at the rise of the [Southside Commons](#) snaking down Brodhead from Packer toward 4th St. And other major construction is taking place inside campus away from our eyes. And other major construction will soon take place at the corner of Adams and Morton. It makes Gadfly sweat just thinking about it.

And not only all that, because of the decision to build on what were parking lots, the University has also "re-visioned" the campus into a "New Mobility Ecosystem . . . a more connected, pedestrian-friendly, and sustainable campus environment."

The new mobility ecosystem includes walking, campus busses, bicycles, carpooling, car sharing, and even free transportation on Lanta. The full package.

It's breath-taking actually.

Now Lehigh is also on the move geographically too, with a Southside campus in the new building at 3rd and New.

Gadfly knew that.

What Gadfly didn't know was that Lehigh is apparently leasing parking spaces on the Northside in the lot on Lehigh St. adjacent to the Wooden Match at the entrance to Sand Island, "0.75 miles from Farrington Square [New and Morton] or 15-minute walk." Bus service will be provided from this "Northside Commuter Lot" to Farrington Square, from which point the commuters can walk to lower campus work locations or take another bus to up-campus destinations.

Ah, so Lehigh is moving to the North side as well, leasing 150 parking spaces in that Northside lot.

Gadfly's antennae would not have been tickled by all this except for the fact that he's sure he's been at two City meetings in the past several months in which questions about using that lot for one City need or another were met by vague response (no mention of Lehigh) and two meetings in which Lehigh reps have said their parking studies showed sufficient parking on campus (no mention of the Northside commuter lot). If Gadfly remembers correctly, the parking specifics are to be addressed in detail when Lehigh meets with the City Planning Commission.

By Lehigh's own count, siting construction on existing parking lots has caused a loss of 839 parking spaces on campus (Gadfly hopes that is right: Lehigh does not give a total number; my number may be lessened a bit by gaining some spaces through re-configurations of certain areas). Parking on campus will now cost \$500/yr. The Northside Commuter Lot will be free. A little bit like getting tickets for a concert, on a certain date people will be able to submit bids for on campus parking and when and if those spaces fill (Gadfly is sure they will), the luckless will have free parking at Northside or at a likewise free parking area on Goodman campus (certainly not walkable if you work on lower campus).

Sounds a bit bizarre to Gadfly who blissfully lives in a Norman Rockwell small-town fantasy world where you park right outside the Malt Shop. But all that is Lehigh's business. What Gadfly wonders about is the decision to lease that lot to Lehigh. Gadfly wonders who made that decision and if it was publicly disclosed. Certainly, it could well have

been. No reason for Gadfly to be let in to everything that goes on. Sigh. And the only reason Gadfly asks is his experience at the meetings described above, where silence about the lot ruled.

If the City has some parking space needs (maybe we don't), is it ok to be opening that area to Lehigh?

And one more thing, \$500/yr to park is real money. In fact, to make the bitter pill slide easier, Lehigh is providing a one-time \$250 salary bump (but Gadfly is not clear on whether that applies to all workers). Again, how Lehigh conducts its business with its staff is its business, no question. But a certain percentage of Lehigh workers – obviously workers at the bottom end of the pay-scale – are City residents and taxpayers who won't be able to afford \$500 for campus parking even if available and will probably of necessity seek the free parking alternative from the get-go, as cumbersome, time-consuming, and second-class citizenry as it is.

Does the City owe some thought to these people?

As usual, Gadfly sees from a distance, may not have all the facts, asks questions, and stands ready to be put straight with a whack upside the head.

But it seems to me that we might want to know more about this move of Lehigh to the Northside as a step to its laudable Path to Prominence. Gadfly has circulated several announcements about our blog to the Lehigh brass, but I am not sure how many if any are following us. But City officials certainly are and can fill us in.