

# Bethlehem Moment 4: Zoning comes to town

The Bethlehem Gadfly Bethlehem Moments, Fun Stuff, Gadfly's posts January 3, 2019

Bethlehem Moment 4  
City Council  
January 2, 2019  
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A Bethlehem Moment: February 24, 1926

On February 24, 1926, the Bethlehem version of the open-range Wild West ended. The new sheriff in town, two years in the studying, was Bethlehem's first zoning ordinance, whose purpose, in the exact same words of our zoning ordinance today, was to "preserve the health, safety, and general welfare of the community." If the zoning ordinance was Wyatt Earp, the Real Estate Board was the villainous Clanton family. The ordinance was ready to go in November 1925, but the Real Estate Board succeeded in getting it delayed till the next Council took office. If this ordinance becomes law, Bethlehem's industrial growth is at an end, they said. Commercial interests constitute the life blood of the city, they said. Taxes will rise, they said. "You can sewer us up, but don't zone us," they said. The ordinance is so lengthy, complicated, and obscure, it's utterly impossible for even the most intelligent man to digest, they said. The Real Estate Board generated a large crowd that turned an informational meeting heated. They claimed that 98% of businessmen on the West Side were opposed to zoning. On February 15, the day of the first reading, a petition to abandon the ordinance signed by 114 residents was delivered to City Council. On February 24, the day of the second reading, the Real Estate Board presented a 10-point manifesto climaxing in the claim that the Zoning Board of Appeals was open to favoritism and discrimination. But the ordinance prevailed. As one wise head remarked at the time, "more property values are destroyed for lack of zoning than by fire."

"City Engineer Tells Real Estate Board of Zoning Ordinance," *Morning Call*, December 15, 1925,

“Voices Opposition to Zoning Ordinance,” *Morning Call*, December 29, 2015.

“Real Estate Board Wants Zoning Plan Further Considered,” *Morning Call*, January 4, 1926.

“Zoning Ordinance under Discussion, *Morning Call*, January 13, 1926.

“‘Special Interest’ Talk Heard at Zoning Ordinance Hearing,” *Morning Call*, January 23, 1926.

“Several Banks Join Real Estate Board,’ *Morning Call*, February 2, 1926.

“Zone Bill Passes the First Reading,” *Morning Call*, February 16, 1926.

“Zone Bill Passes Second and Final Reading in Council,” *Morning Call*, February 25, 1926.

“Council Faces Problem in Zone Bill Appeal Board,” *Morning Call*, March 1, 1926.

“Realtors Discuss Multiple Listings, also Fire Final Gun at Zoning Ordinance,” *Morning Call*, March 2, 1926.

“Permits Refused under Zone Ordinance,” *Morning Call*, February 7, 1927.