

# Martin Tower: a private tour for Council members (9)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Gadfly's posts, Martin Tower, Serious Issues April 8, 2019

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*(9th in a series on Martin Tower)*

*Initial sketch plans for Martin Tower site at Planning Commission*

*4PM Thursday April 11 Town Hall*

*Martin Tower demolition May 19*

*The owners have submitted a plan for medical offices, retail stores, a gas station, a restaurant, and garden apartments for the 53-acre site.*

Field trip! Field trip!

City Council members were given a private tour of the view from the top of the soon-to-be-demolished Martin Tower prior to the Planning Commission meeting this week.

One sniff’s additional strategy from the Handbook for Developers. Gadfly said the [Don Cunningham article](#) a few weeks back had the feel of a strategic attempt by the business/developer community to get out in front of possibly resurgent public controversy over demolition. Gadfly was not Gadfly in 2015, but the conflict over rezoning the Martin Tower tract was no boudoir argument.

So, hence the field trip and full-court press (you gonna watch the NCAA finals tonight?) to create a climate of supportive public-official opinion. Looks like the strategy worked. Look below at the appreciative comments by the good Councilpeople when absorbing the amazing view.

[Nicole Radzievich, “A last look at a great view: Bethlehem City Council visits the doomed Martin Tower.” Morning Call, March 27, 2019.](#)

Lewis Ronca, who owns the building with developer Norton Herrick, gave City Council members the rooftop tour of the 21-story building after his representative walked them through a master plan for the redevelopment of the 53-acre site once the dust settles.

The tour was not a public meeting because council was not there to deliberate on any issue, council solicitor John Spirk Jr. said. The media was granted access to the gathering upon request.

“I think this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to understand the topography of Bethlehem that I’m not likely to see again,” [Councilwoman] Van Wirt said. “I want to understand this parcel and its relationship to Bethlehem.”

“This is a nice treat,” [said Councilwoman Negron].

“I learned the view is as great as everyone says it is,” [Council president] Waldron said. “No,” [Councilman] Callahan cut in, “it’s even better.” The tower is coming down to make room for a \$200 million development of 528 garden apartments, a 132-room hotel, a restaurant, retail shops, three medical office buildings and a gas station. . . . There would be 8 acres of open space along a tree-lined hillside on the eastern edge of the property and sidewalks that connect to the adjacent streets, trails and parks, according to a sketch plan submitted by Ronca and Herrick. Several council members said after the tour that the trip to the top provided a perspective of how important it was for the owners to get the redevelopment right.

*Sara K. Satullo, “We went to the top of Martin Tower with Bethlehem City Council. Here’s what we saw.” lehighvalleylive.com, March 28, 2019. Lots of great photos.*

On Wednesday evening, Bethlehem City Council members were treated to a private tour of the 21-story Martin Tower ahead of its implosion. . . . Owners Lewis Ronca and Norton Herrick allowed council members to visit the roughly 53-acre property at the corner of Eighth and Eaton avenues to review a new master plan for the site’s redevelopment.

The developers plan to invest \$200 million in reimagining the property into a work-live redevelopment, featuring 528 upscale garden-style apartments along the eastern edge of the property, a 132-room hotel and a gas station and convenience store. It also includes two retail buildings totaling 33,100 square feet, a 5,080-square-foot restaurant and three

medical office buildings totaling 124,854 square feet. A trail surrounding the site is designed to promote walkability and links to city and county parks, plus walking trails along the nearby Monocacy Creek.

Bethlehem City Council won't take any votes on the property's redevelopment. It rests solely in the hand of the Bethlehem Planning Commission, which will be tasked with approving all land development plans for the property. The commission is set to review the master plan on April 11.

The property is in Bethlehem's City Revitalization and Improvement Zone, which directs certain future state and local taxes created by CRIZ development to cover construction costs.

And there was yet another interesting step in massaging the public before the Planning Commission meets. Coming up next!

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