


The goals of the proposed “Packer Avenue Promenade”: knitting together the northern and southern halves of lower campus, improving the safety and mobility of pedestrians

The Bethlehem Gadfly Lehigh University, Southside January 23, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts about Lehigh University and the Southside 

TONIGHT!

**Pilot study: temporary closing of Packer Avenue
Public meeting from 6 to 8 p.m. Jan. 23 at the
Broughal Middle School Auditorium**

Nicole Radzievich, “Should Bethlehem close this major street near Lehigh University?” Morning Call, January 16, 2020.

Impeachment closed early Wednesday night, and Gadfly found himself reading through the interesting [“Sustainability Impact Assessment”](#) the Lehigh class did on closing Packer Ave. between Vine and Webster and creating “The Packer Avenue Promenade.”

The study focused on six areas: sense of place, local business and the arts, the natural environment, traffic and transportation, pedestrian mobility, and safety and emergency access.

Lehigh “tasked” this graduate class to do the study, and Gadfly wonders if enough consideration was given to impact on the residential neighborhoods around Lehigh.

But then, he thought, are there really [any residential neighborhoods left](#) to be affected?

Has Lehigh sprawl finally succeeded in snuffing out the residential neighborhoods?

Anybody want to comment on that?

Here is a random collection of soundbites from the report that kinda jumped out at Gadfly.

- The goals of the proposed Packer Avenue Promenade project are to knit together the northern and southern halves of Lehigh University's Asa Packer Campus and improve the safety and mobility of pedestrians.
- One of the main concerns with the proposed closing of Packer Avenue to vehicular traffic is the impact it will have on the local community and its relationship to Lehigh University.
- Packer Avenue is currently a relatively heavily traversed road with metered parking on both sides of the street. It is used primarily by people affiliated with the university, with university Transportation Services estimating that over 70% of the cars parked on Packer Avenue are Lehigh University affiliated.
- The Packer Avenue Promenade project follows a pattern of eliminating vehicle traffic from roads on the interior of campus. University Drive, Memorial Drive, and Library Drive, all now pedestrian walkways, have been closed to cars over the years.
- With ongoing potential to improve "town-gown" relations, we recommend that Lehigh University utilize this space to hold programming that is not only for the Lehigh University community, but also invites and includes all communities in Bethlehem.
- By making it more difficult or unpleasant to access Zoellner, we risk reducing utilization and attendance. This would have a significant financial impact on Zoellner itself, and would also impact any businesses that depend upon patronage associated with Zoellner events.
- With the traffic shunted from Packer Avenue to East 4th Street, an increase in congestion can be expected on East 4th Street and is indeed welcomed by local businesses. Conventional wisdom would dictate that congestion impedes growth, but this is not necessarily the case. In fact, economic growth is correlated with congestion until a threshold of 15-minute delay per trip is achieved.
- To improve upon the 2005 committee, and in order to work towards greater cohesion and communication between the Lehigh University and Bethlehem communities, committee members should also

represent Bethlehem community members and institutions. This might ensure that affiliates of neighboring institutions, such as Broughal Middle School and St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church, are not only aware of developments in the Packer Avenue Promenade project, but that they can also voice their concerns, ideas, and opinions regarding mobility and access.

- The proposed project is expected to improve pedestrian safety from assault and crime because Lehigh University would be able to replace and alter the lighting and design of the area, once Packer Avenue is transferred from the city to Lehigh University.
- The proposed project does not degrade emergency access for ambulances, fire trucks, and service vehicles on Packer Avenue with respect to accommodating service and emergency vehicles on the promenade and emergency vehicle response times.

Next Gadfly will post discussion of the promenade by Lehigh student contributors to the report at our Environmental Advisory Council back in May.