

Bethlehem Manor: “It’s a nice homey environment. We’re in, you know, a neighborhood.”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Bethlehem Manor, Neighborhoods, Serious Issues August 20, 2019

(Latest in a series of posts on Bethlehem Manor and Neighborhoods)

Ok, back to our “anatomy” lesson on a Zoning Board hearing, focusing on Bethlehem Manor’s proposal to construct an addition to their Rosemont school personal care facility that will enable a 70% increase in population.

We’ve seen the Administrator testimony; we’ve seen the neighbor testimony. What about the role of the Zoning Board?

The Zoning panel is made up of 5 residents nominated by the Mayor and appointed by City Council.

The members of the Zoning Board are the most important factor in these cases. Both sides argue their positions.

But the Board decides.

Members of the Zoning Board — it goes without saying — must be intelligent, objective, fair. And maybe “empathetic” would be a good addition to a list of desirable traits.

One of the members of this panel is currently an alternate member of the Board but is up for appointment as a full member at tonight’s City

Council meeting. Gadfly will post on this important appointment later today. Stay tuned.

But for now look at this few minute selection of the Board questioning the Bethlehem Manor Administrator to get a flavor of the interaction. [Zone Hearing.](#)

The interaction between Board and Administrator elicits several important points. The motivation for the expansion is the desire to provide private rooms to meet concrete demand for them, a demand she did not realize at the beginning. The Administrator elaborates on the reason people want private rooms to start, how movement to shared rooms at the same location is fostered when money becomes an issue, why she wants to fill that demand at this Rosemont school location rather than elsewhere, how she interacts with neighbors — while indicating her confidence that she would fill the new space in quick order.

Good points. Worthwhile listening to this interchange if you are playing Board member as Gadfly was and weighing what your decision would be.

But, ironically, the Administrator, in praising the neighborhood — in Gadfly's opinion — makes the neighbor's case. In answering a question about why a fence was not erected along the outside recreation area as promised in the original Zoning approval in 2016, the Administrator says:

It's a nice homey environment. We're in, you know, a neighborhood, and to take a fence and put it there, you know, you're 95 years old and you're looking at a fence. You know it's not as attractive. . . .It's nice for them to look out.

Wow! There's the crux. The neighbors talk about such a large addition rending "the fabric" of the neighborhood, and Bethlehem Manor's position is that they precisely want to provide their often very senior personal care residents with the feel of a neighborhood.

See what makes this an interesting case?