

Right down the middle on 2 W. Market St. (12)

The Bethlehem Gadfly 2 W. Market St., Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues November 9, 2018

(12th in a series of posts on 2 W. Market St.)

Gadfly has remarked that he got into this issue late, that he didn't have a full grasp of all sides, and wondered what could have caused a marathon Zoning Board meeting in the past.

Now he knows.

Yesterday's meeting on whether the stately home at 2 W. Market can be used for commercial purposes went well over 2 hours, saw testimony by well over a dozen people, and posed such a knotty problem that our Planning Commission deadlocked 2-2 not once but twice. (There are officially 5 members of the Commission.)

The petition of the homeowner/business owner now goes before City Council on November 20 (Gadfly is not sure whether this hearing will be part of the normal Council meeting at 7PM or at a special time of 6PM – and will clarify later).

The sides of the issue Gadfly were weakest on – the City and the homeowners – were well represented. There were presentations by the homeowner's attorney, by one of the Quadrant partners, and by the City. Lots of new information for Gadfly to absorb.

Gadfly plans to break down this issue – which is just one of several “neighborhood control” issues we've been following – shortly, but for now the journalists will fill you in on this latest step in a controversy that goes back several years.

[Kevin Duffy, “Bethlehem City Council to consider ordinance that would allow historic home to be office.” *Morning Call*, November 9, 2018.](#)

Attorney Jim Preston, representing Morning Star, proposed an amendment that would allow for both uses by special exception, which would need to be granted by the zoning hearing board if the amendment were first approved by council. He contended that both the zoning hearing board and county court had upheld the variance request, finding it presented no harm to the surrounding community.

Tim Stevens, an attorney representing five residents opposed to the use, contended that allowing the amendment to pass would constitute “spot zoning.” He said it would open the door for more non-conforming uses

and would serve to diminish housing options. “It’s self-serving; it doesn’t benefit the welfare of all the Bethlehem citizens,” he said.

Kori Lannan, of Quadrant, dismissed the notion that they would eventually flip the business to another entity, and said she and her four business partners are committed to the community because they are all lifetime residents of Bethlehem. “We love being part of historic downtown Bethlehem and contributing to its preservation in a meaningful way,” she said.

Planning and Zoning Director Darlene Heller cautioned the board that there was no way to know how many properties would be affected in other parts of the city if the amendment is approved. “Therefore the end result of the amendment is unclear,” she said.

Several nearby residents, some of them business owners, spoke in favor of allowing Quadrant to continue, and praised the owners for beautifying the building that sat on the market for an extended period. Daniel Nigito, a certified financial planner who lives on West Market Street and operates a business at a separate address there, said he supports the business, referring to himself and Quadrant as “the caretakers” of the district’s vintage structures. “We take care of them because of what they represent to the city,” he said.

Neighboring resident Barbara Diamond said that, despite the effort put into beautifying the building, it still doesn’t fit into the character of the community. “It’s still an office, it’s not a home,” she said. Councilwoman Paige Van Wirt, who also lives nearby, made it clear how she would likely vote. Adding her voice to the objectors, she said Quadrant should have sought to fill one of the vacancies along Broad Street, where zoning for professional office space is in place. “Our zoning map is an aspirational map, it’s residential — that’s what we want it to be,” she said.

Planning Commissioner Joy Cohen, who voted against the amendment, said she was “very concerned” about how it would impact other portions of the city. Fellow commissioner Matthew Malozi, who voted with her, said he had to base his decision solely on Bethlehem’s Comprehensive Plan, and not on emotion.

See also: [Jacob Kise, “Bethlehem planners split on plan to turn a house into financial office.” WFMZ-TV, November 8, 2018.](#)