


Healing as the goal of the Packer Matter

The Bethlehem Gadfly Lehigh University, Southside March 4, 2020

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

Gadfly loves to compare his thinking to our elected officials. Join him. The Council members gave us clear and substantial rationales. Remember, too, that one of the main reasons for the Gadfly project is to help you know your Councilpeople better so that you can be the most informed voter you can be. This is a good opportunity. Whom do you agree with, disagree with? Who makes you think? Who gave you something new to think about? Whom are you glad to see with a seat at the Head Table?

[The Gadfly, February 24](#)

As the opening of the temporary closing of Packer Ave. approaches on Monday, Gadfly would like to wrap up the series of posts he made on the individual comments from Council folk approving the measure 3-2.

Gadfly doesn't always agree with Council decisions, of course, but what he looks for is good conversation — “Good conversation builds community” — and he thought there was good conversation from a variety of perspectives on the Packer Matter at the February 18 Council meeting.

So he hopes you took a few minutes to consider the range of statements and positions from the individual Councilpersons. Gadfly hopes you will be as much interested in why they voted as how they voted. The “why” is the indicator of the calibre of person we have entrusted with our public lives. You can respect a vote you don't agree with if you respect the basis on which it was made.

What rises to the top as Gadfly thinks back on the good conversation at the meeting was [Councilwoman Van Wirt's use of “vision.”](#)

Councilwoman Van Wirt spoke third, and the “vision” idea was picked up by Councilmen Reynolds and Waldron who followed her.

“Community” is an aphrodisiac word for Gadfly. “Vision” is another.

All the talk from Lehigh was ho-hum. Necessary. But ho-hum. For him their talk started at the wrong end of the rhetorical spectrum.

Give me the vision. Excite me. Then we can do the ho-hum.

Give me the song, the poetry, then I’ll listen to the engineers and bean counters.

Build the castle in the air. Then we can talk about the supports underneath it.

The collaborative past actions of Lehigh and the City in creating the [Lost Neighborhood](#) on the north side of Packer Ave. seem manifestly reprehensible. A power grab.

Gadfly’s sympathies were there with the ghosts of the past who for him still haunt the area from Packer to 4th St.

He remembers thinking somewhere along in the conversation about closing Packer that if it happens, Lehigh should be required, as restitution, to have a statue, a monument erected to the memory of the Lost Neighborhood at the center of the promenade.

No, better yet, not something *required* of Lehigh as *restitution*. But something done by Lehigh *willingly* as *repentance*.

Perhaps at the center of University Walk and the promenade — Lehigh might build a Southside Memorial Fountain of some sort by which people could sit, pause, and reflect come a summer day on the damage done when Power and Politics and Progress are out of control.

Silly Gadfly. A topic for a Thursday afternoon session with his therapist for sure.

But Lehigh’s [Carolina Hernandez](#) at the February 18 meeting was like a squirt of 3-1-oil on his tight lock on the grim past.

And then Councilwoman Van Wirt's "I do have a vision of what this permanent closure could look like for Bethlehem, and it's a great vision" was like an ice-cutter freeing a trapped cruise ship.

A *vision* of what could be done with the Packer Matter!

A "great vision"!

Gadfly came alive!

There were vision-teasers: a community fund, a business association.

And then with President Waldron, "is there a playground there, is there a community space . . . community programming?"

Not the whole vision. Not yet.

But enough to turn Gadfly's perspective 180 degrees.

The word that came to mind was "heal."

How might the Packer Matter become a "healing"?

If the closing of Packer Ave. could become an acknowledged healing ritual and not another grave stomping, then Gadfly's on board.

It is good to have Councilfolk with vision.