

Council acts “to protect and preserve Southside neighborhoods for everyone” (the Antalics ordinance)

The Bethlehem Gadfly | Lehigh University, Southside | December 17, 2020

 *The latest in a series of posts on the Southside* 

Anna Smith is a Southside resident, full-time parent, and community activist with a background in community development and education.

Early in the coming new year, the important and long-awaited ordinance regulating student housing, much discussed here in previous posts (click [Southside](#) on the sidebar), will have a public hearing and go through the normal first and second reading process.

However, at their December 15 meeting, City Council passed a resolution making it a **“pending ordinance”** as of December 31, which, if Gadfly understands correctly, means that in a sense it is in effect as of that date.

Anna Smith tee’d up the vote superbly.

Comment delivered to City Council December 15, 2020.

Audio Player

00:00

00:00

Use Up/Down Arrow keys to increase or decrease volume.

Good evening, my name is Anna Smith, and I live at 631 Ridge St in south Bethlehem. I'd like to thank the members of Council who took the time to attend the Community Development Committee meeting in October to hear from residents and other South Bethlehem stakeholders about their support for the regulation of student housing. In addition to the over 20 people who spoke at the meeting, over 100 additional stakeholders signed their names to a letter in support of the zoning overlay. Tonight, you finally have the opportunity to take action to protect and preserve Southside neighborhoods for *everyone*. For families, renters, homeowners, boarding house and group home residents, and, yes, students.

Why is this so important? You've heard from a lot of us, and we've given a lot of reasons – preserve affordable homeownership and rental opportunities, protect quality of life, encourage Lehigh students to live



closer to campus to reduce the numbers of cars brought to campus, and encourage students to live in or near the business district so that they can easily patronize locally-owned businesses. Restrict haphazard development on steep slopes. Reduce evictions and displacement of long-time residents when properties are converted to student housing. Concentrate student housing in neighborhoods where it already dominates, making it easier for colleges and universities to keep tabs on issues of safety and social life.

Now, if those aren't enough reasons, I'd like to contextualize this policy change from my personal perspective.

I want to talk to you as someone who loves everything about South Bethlehem and who has spent the majority of my life living and working on its streets. I moved back here after 8 years away and decided to invest in the neighborhood that made me who I am, much in the way that my parents decided to invest in the Southside 33 years ago. Not because of ArtsQuest, or the Southside Arts District, or Lehigh, although those are all important aspects of our neighborhood's character that make the Southside a great place to live. I moved back here because I want to raise my Latina daughter in a neighborhood where she won't be the only kid speaking Spanish, and where she'll hear Spanish on the street just as often as she will hear English. I invested in my neighborhood because I want my daughter to grow up like I did, with friends and neighbors of all racial backgrounds and socioeconomic levels. I came back because I believe in our public schools and want my daughter to be able to walk to Donegan Elementary in a few years. I moved back because I wanted to live within a five-minute walk of a playground, a pool, and the Greenway, restaurants, mini-markets, and the woods. I moved back because South Bethlehem represents the best of what it means to live in a true community. Sure, we have some challenges, like any community, but we have so much to be proud of.

And it is so important for our elected officials to understand that—not just at a surface level, or based on their own experiences on the Southside as outsiders, or from conversations with representatives of institutions... We need our elected officials and their staff to make an effort to listen and spend time with residents of all backgrounds that make up the vibrant, dynamic community at work in our Southside neighborhoods. To walk around, like I do, and chat with my next-door neighbor, a single Grandma who gives my daughter a little present for every holiday, and the young Puerto Rican couple with twins next door who always offer us food from the barbecue. The young married couple

of women with the pit bulls who hang out on the porch every evening with their next-door neighbors, a black family with kids who race their scooters in front of my house and always ask to pet my dog. The older white man with a disabled son who always keeps the front of his house impeccably maintained and watches over the street. The Mexican family who just moved in this year but have already shown us all up with their holiday decorations. This is what my ideal neighborhood looks like, and where I chose to invest. We need you to understand why this is worth protecting and thinking about, not just today but each time you are asked to consider a policy change that will impact us.

The neighborhoods of the Southside have always had a certain reputation, and most of those who live here have rarely had a say in decisions that are made about it. We don't have many elected representatives or appointed ones who live on our streets, and we often assume that no one from the other side of town cares about our neighborhoods. But things are changing, and folks from outside the Southside are now paying attention. New folks want to move here, to live or open businesses. Developers want to build, and others see opportunities to make a profit. And I want to be clear: I appreciate the energy and the fact that folks are getting excited about the neighborhoods that I love so much. But we can't forget what is attracting these folks in the first place—the essential character of our community that has been here for a lot longer than I have. And we owe that to the people who defined these neighborhoods, who invested their time and livelihoods into these streets and homes, who send their kids to local schools, who watch over neighborhood parks and walk the Greenway to work every day. The families who opened businesses decades ago in a different economic climate, and who have won the love and support of generations of residents. Please remember them. As our Southside evolves into the future, we need to plan for the long-term and be proactive, lest we risk losing the very heart of our community and what makes it truly unique, and irreplaceable.

I'm speaking tonight because I think that the policy change you are considering is the product of that very type of consideration that I just mentioned. The Mayor and his Administration have listened—truly listened—and committed themselves to a long, exceedingly thorough process to proactively protect and preserve the essential character of our diverse neighborhoods. They understand why this is important for the future of our Southside as whole—how strong neighborhoods are a necessary condition for a viable City. And you have listened. You've attended meetings, read emails, talked with residents, and informed yourselves about the issues. This is, perhaps, the most thorough, well-informed proposal that I've seen this current administration put forward, and I'm proud to have been a part of the coalition that consulted with the administration over the last several years as the policy was developed. Tonight, you finally have a chance to stand with the residents of South Bethlehem who have implored you to act. Please vote to cut off all new authorizations of student housing development outside the student housing overlay as of December 31. Our neighborhoods depend on it.

Thank you.

Anna Smith

Councilwoman Negron was kind enough to remember the years of toil that Stephen Antalics put in both in print and at the Town Hall podium in support of such an ordinance.



With due respect to the yeoman work of Anna and many others, in Gadville we'll think of this as the "Antalics Ordinance."

So we follow the Councilwoman's lead and give a tip o' the hat to Gadfly #1.

The Bethlehem Gadfly