

# The developer needs to be treated the same as the homeowner (11)

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Serious Issues, Walkability and Bikeability March 12, 2019  
*(11th in a series of posts on Walkability and Bikeability)*

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Gadfly:

So, I guess Mr. Thode (for whom I have a great deal of respect) believes in unequal application of the law as well? Because, what both Bethlehem Councilwomen Van Wirt and Negron have been battling is exactly that issue. Neither one is anti-development, but those who are attacking them are trying their best to portray them in that fashion.

Both zoning and historic district ordinances have requirements. In historic districts you are supposed to build to the scale and mass of the resources that qualified those areas to become National Register Historic Districts in the first place. In zoning certain uses are permitted in certain areas. These laws are not being applied equally in this City, and both Negron and Van Wirt see that, and many residents do as well.

Mr. Thode makes absolute sense with his assessment. And, for example, there was no public argument against the development directly across from the Fowler Center on East Third Street, because it was not subject to Historic Conservation Commission review and subject to the local Historic District ordinance. Both the 6 story office building and public parking garage on South New Street were. 510 Flats is a fantastic development that “fits” where it’s built.

And then to compound matters, everyone involved with the South New Street office development, including the City administration and five Members of Council, conveniently buried their heads in the sand when an unauthorized expansion of the 6th floor restaurant was undertaken without the proper

review. The citizen commission recognized the faux pas and refused to endorse it because it contradicted the highly negotiated compromise of the original Certificate of Appropriateness!

So, the difficult part of Mr. Thode's observation for Bethlehem is that both central business districts are also in whole or in part located in National Register Historic Districts. Studies have shown that a sense of place, including preservation of historic buildings and areas, is critical to these areas being successful. In these cases you can't have it both ways, and that is exactly the position both Councilwomen have taken. You can build higher around them but shouldn't within them. It's that simple.

As far as Councilwoman Van Wirt's use of her vehicle to do her job vs. her endorsement of walkability, these are totally different issues that can coexist. When your employment requires you to work at various locations throughout the Lehigh Valley, it's plain and simple, you drive. Schedules, services, accessibility and appointments do not make walking conducive from say downtown Bethlehem to the Gracedale County Home, and public transportation options are limited. So, you drive your auto from one to the next point of service because you have to meet the obligations of your employment.

However, what you also do is walk from your residence to City Hall, restaurants on Main Street, visits with friends, parks, etc.

The bottom line is that both Van Wirt and Negron are not anti-highrise, density, or development. They want compliance with City ordinances and City Hall's complicity with developers stopped. They want the developer to be treated the same as the homeowner who needs a permit to add a porch, or build a garage, or a historic district property owner who wants to paint their home. All they have been advocating for is equal treatment under the law. Nothing more, nothing less!

Dana