

May 9 might be the time to hit the pause button (33)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Martin Tower, Serious Issues May 6, 2019

(33rd in a series on Martin Tower)

Martin Tower demolition May 19

www.martintowerbethlehem.com

Informational meeting

Thursday, May 9, 6PM

Nitschmann Middle School

“It is amazing to me that so many people are reacting to this implosion
as entertainment or spectacle rather than a health risk.”

Barbara Diamond

John Marquette is a retired librarian/archivist, author, historian, and a resident of Bethlehem. His current project is focused on the restoration of the interior of the Archibald Johnston Mansion in Housenick Park.

Gadfly:

As I review the questions collected by you and the comments amplifying and supporting them — and there are many — I’m starting to wonder what is predicated the Herrick/Ronca rush to demolish Martin Tower and replace it with unimaginative cookiecutter apartments and office buildings.

It’s becoming clearer to me that back office work has long abandoned Manhattan, departing for Long Island City (Citibank), Jersey City, Hoboken, and other five-mile-radius-of-Grand-Central locations. All of those areas are subject to severe climate events, and the infrastructure serving NYC environs is failing without plans or funds to renovate or rehabilitate.

This leaves Pennsylvania in a very good position with our robust telecommunications infrastructure (easing telecommuting), a declining but not failing highway system servicing the distribution centers (mostly at night), great bus service to New York, an elevation of at least 300 feet above sea level, and ample room for more housing stock — especially affordable luxury housing when compared with NJ/NY market prices.

Herrick and Ronca want in quickly, and to heck with how the 50-plus acres of the plateau over the Monocacy looks from the street or from the air. The Planning Commission rightly recognized their lack of imagination and “suggested” revisions. I fear we’re not going to see much variation from the original sketch plans.

Everybody wants to build. The current owner of the Boyd sees far more profit in building housing than in showing movies or hosting collegiate theater. A former mayor and a local developer, fresh from topping off a southside building with some bonus square footage, are eager to put more than 50 units on a downtown hillside overlooking the creek. And of course there’s the Armory project.

There is no question in my mind that Bethlehem is a far more walkable, desirable, and cosmopolitan city than Allentown. It has far more available space for expansion than Easton. It's no surprise that developers want to seize opportunities — and quickly — to maximize profits on attractive apartments in a regional market starved for housing inventory.

This is neither the time nor the place to discuss affordable rental housing versus market-rate apartments. This is the time when we ask our elected officials to help us understand why a community more than 275 years old, now a city barely 102 years old needs to be so fiercely aggressive about infill construction with too little attention to planning.

Bethlehem is the Portland, Oregon, of 40 years ago. I say that with pride in what we've become and how desirable it is for millennials these days. I do not want us to become the Portland of 2019. If slowing development down means disassembling Martin Tower instead of “go-booming” it and getting sketch plans which integrate planned construction into the landscape, the May 9 meeting is one place we can call for a pause.

I'm thinking about going away the weekend of the 19th and swapping my heat pump filters several times in the succeeding days.

John

Gadfly reminds followers that email links to the Mayor and City Council are on the sidebar for easy access. If it is not obvious, the reason Gadfly has been including this footer is to suggest that if you have public health and safety concerns and concerns about tardy City communication (follow-up information was promised mid-April), that you communicate those concerns directly and powerfully to your public officials.