

Sinkhole risk for LVA – why not Southside? (13)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Charter Schools, Education, Serious Issues February 16, 2019

(13th in a series on Education and Charter Schools)

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:

Putting aside the merits of charter schools for a moment, I'm concerned about the proposed Jaindl Boulevard location for Lehigh Valley Academy. It's not a question of neighborhoods, it's one of geology. More specifically, it's about the risk of sinkholes on the 31 acres under consideration.

Pick any excavating contractor out of the phone directory or Google and ask how often they are called to either of the Hanovers, Bethlehem, Palmer, or Forks townships to remediate sinkholes. The geological formation under the rich topsoil is karst — porous limestone. When disturbed, and more importantly, saturated with water, it dissolves and collapses. Buildings built atop them or near them follow. A property I'm associated with on Bath Pike (less than a mile from the school's site) just spent nearly \$15,000 to obtain a site study and fill in a hole. *

Former farmlands and meadows in the Lehigh Valley are at their highest and best use when left more or less alone. Developing them poses risks of creating sinkholes, and the risks for the charter school end up being borne by the taxpayers in the Bethlehem Area School District, either for sinkhole insurance or for remediation of new holes.

The *Morning Call* covered Parkland's problems with a sinkhole at a middle school right before the beginning of this academic year. It is costly. We have brownfield properties available on the South Side ready for a school, if the new owners cooperate. Why not ask them?

The state has a great interactive map of sinkhole locations on its Department of Conservation and Natural Resources website

(<http://www.gis.dcnr.state.pa.us/mobilemaps/index.aspx>)

John

** I can show you the paperwork from the excavators with our estimates. The geology is very well known. Somebody is going to make a lot of money on the land deal, and you and I apparently will be footing the bill.*