

Voices opposed to regulating student housing

The Bethlehem Gadfly Southside October 27, 2020

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

proposed ordinance to regulate student housing

Overview of Student Housing Ordinance (1)

video of October 22 Community Development Committee meeting

So now let's begin talking about the Community Development Committee meeting last Thursday on a proposed ordinance regulating student housing.

Gadfly has spent much energy on this issue. If you missed all that and are shamed and sorry, click **"Southside"** on the right-hand sidebar.

This issue of regulating student housing has been in the air for decades, is almost as old as Gadfly #1 Stephen Antalics, and Gadfly is glad to see it finally "on the table," and is in favor of its passage.

Public comment was of as high a quality as Gadfly has ever seen it — what Gadfly loves about being a gadfly is amplifying and archiving resident response. It's usually a joy.

About 20 residents commented at the meeting, the overwhelming majority in favor of the ordinance.

But following Gadfly's desire for balance and hearing all sides, let's begin with the three commenters who opposed the ordinance.

Gadfly always wants to know and to weigh positions contrary to his own.

We should understand and respect those positions.

Southside landlord (1) (7 mins.) **Audio Player not available in this archive**

A man whose name I couldn't get but who is associated with a business that owns many properties in Bethlehem doesn't see the need for the ordinance, though he doesn't go into detail about the reasons why, indicating that they have been expressed before. If there is to be an ordinance, however, he suggests some changes, such as a problem with the definition of student; if there is to be limitation outside the boundary, there should be enhancement within; the boundaries should be expanded; changes in signage regulations. Changes on these subjects would make the ordinance more practical and more enforceable. Council should ask itself these questions: "What is the real issue we are trying to solve?" "Is this ordinance the best way to solve that problem?"

Southside landlord (2) (7 mins.)

A multiple property owner since 2003 (couldn't catch his name). "What problem is this ordinance trying to solve?" Parking? Noise? Litter? Overcrowding? Affordable housing? Development? Design? He's still not clear on the problem its attempting to solve. Perhaps the purpose needs to be honed to effect meaningful change. Broad scope means tough to enforce. Affordable housing seems the main issue, and he's 100% in agreement. But there is no affordability crisis in Bethlehem. Prices rising nationwide, nothing here specific to Southside. Drill down to the facts. Dozens of homes for sale now in South Bethlehem with mortgages less than rents. He is (was?) part of a City committee on affordable housing. Consultant came up with proposals, and student regulation was not one of them. The City committee has not discussed any of the consultant's proposals. Only 5% of City rentals are student rentals and are inspected annually, while some of the others have not been inspected for decades. Who's been advocating for those others? Many in substandard conditions. Ends with defense of students.

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A DeSales student (2 mins.)

Wants to move off campus to further maturity by providing for himself. People he knows have been robbed by residents. So it's not fair to assume that college students are causing problems. Wants to further his life experience in college and regulation will limit that possibility.