

Maybe more apartments on the way

The Bethlehem Gadfly Neighborhoods June 29, 2020

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Morning Call photos by April Gamiz and Christina Tatu

from Christina Tatu, “Two historic Bethlehem churches may become apartment buildings.” Morning Call, June 28, 2020.

The 170-year-old former Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church at 537 High St. is proposed to be converted to 15 apartments with off-street parking by developer Ryan Dunn of DTMG 1665 VCP, LLC.

In the South Side, the former Zion First Hungarian Lutheran Church with parcels at 938 E. Fourth St. and 949 E. Fifth St. would be partially demolished to make way for 24 affordable apartments, said developer Plamen Ayvazov, president of Monocacy General Contracting.

The Bethlehem Zoning Hearing Board will review both proposals July 8.

Ayvazov plans to keep the front of the church and its steeple intact, but would demolish the rear of the church to construct a five-story addition for the apartments. The building would also have a community room and fitness area, he said. There would be 42 parking spaces. Ayvazov believes the church has been empty for more than three years.

Ayvazov bought the building for \$285,000 in November, according to Northampton County property records. He believes it was constructed around 1925. He was able to salvage some of the church’s interior, selling or donating various artifacts, including wooden pews purchased by a Connecticut congregation.



The project would feature two-bedroom apartments ranging from \$800-\$1,100 per month.

Dunn didn't return a phone call requesting information about his project.

According to documents filed with the city, Dunn wants to redevelop the five-story building into 15 apartments, with 21 parking spaces.

Neither church is in the city's historic district. Darlene Heller, Bethlehem's director of planning and zoning, isn't sure how long the churches have been empty.

