

“It is amazing to me that so many people are reacting to this implosion as entertainment or spectacle rather than a health risk.” (23)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Martin Tower, Serious Issues May 3, 2019

(23rd in a series on Martin Tower)

Martin Tower demolition May 19

www.martintowerbethlehem.com

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implosion**

as entertainment or spectacle rather than a health risk.”

Barbara Diamond

Barbara Diamond enjoys retirement as Lehigh University Director of Foundation Relations by engaging in various activities and organizations hopefully for the betterment of the community. Her particular interests at the moment are preventing gun violence, local government ethics reform, and Bethlehem Democratic Committee work.

Gadfly,

Thank you very much for raising awareness about the potential health risks posed by the implosion. Many thanks to Marty for doing the research.

Steve and I have been trying to learn more about what measures the city is taking to protect the public from any remaining asbestos plus other noxious agents like mold, lead paint, and building materials that will be aerosolized during demolition. The more we looked into this, the more we are concerned by the lack of public information and possibly the lack of adequate safety measures.

We attended the planning commission meeting on 4/11 where Steve asked for some information but was told by the chair that no questions would be entertained about anything except the plan. He advised that the city had created a website to answer such questions. When we went to the website martintowerbethlehem.com, we did not find specific information about what measures are being taken — just vague assurance that they were — such as enforcing a safe distance.

I called the state Health Dept Wednesday 4/17 and was referred to the DEP and eventually to the regional county air quality division of the DEP. They are coordinating the demolition. I spoke with Matt Bardzilouskas (570.826.5440). He told me he had just started his position earlier that week. I believe he is district supervisor in the air quality division. He told me that during a walk through Martin Tower that day, 4/17, a small amount of asbestos was found.

In response to my question, he said that the DEP will not certify that there is no public health risk from asbestos from the demolition of the building and doesn't know if anyone would. He was not aware of the EPA or DEP being present at demolition and doubts they will monitor air quality (WFMZ reported that PA DEP would be present and monitor on the day. <http://www.wfmz.com/news/lehigh-valley/dep-will-monitor-air-quality-concerns-at-martin-tower-implosion/1065121598>). I asked if there was any plan to monitor air quality following the implosion, and he said no. There are no regulations requiring that. It is up to the responsible parties (developers and the demolition company they hire)

to do that but not mandatory. I find this troubling. The only measure he knew of at that time was to put up chain link on each floor inside and line with fabric.

I spoke with Matt again on Friday 4/19. He told me that at the meeting the day before, which included the demo contractors, EMS, and others, they have some preliminary plans to suppress dust with watersprays (similar to snowmaking equipment) and water cannons that can be elevated. He believes the demo company is planning to monitor air quality before, during, and after, but he was not firm on that. Also not sure if the data will be public. I asked him who would be on site with authority to delay or postpone demo in case of high winds (which is a “best practice”; he said the contractor decides and, Matt said, the only reason the contractor will delay is if someone is in the blast zone (he said this with certainty). He said that he doesn’t know about any discussion of what to do in case of high winds (there were sidebar meetings that he was not part of).

Of concern, he mentioned that they have never dealt with an implosion of this magnitude (his area is air quality and dust suppression). He said there is no requirement for a permit that would be based on meeting air quality measures; the demo company just has to be making a reasonable effort. I asked him if he would leave town that day if he lived here, but he said he wouldn’t get into his personal conduct.

I am glad the city has arranged a public hearing, but it is late. The city has not done a good job informing people about this situation. They shut down the comments aspect of their site. I think they should be providing the public with more information about how they are adhering to best practices for demolition of an asbestos-laden building. I have a feeling that there is more risk to the public than people realize and maybe more can be done [for safety] than is being considered — for example having an independent entity monitor air quality or having someone there who

could postpone the implosion in case of high winds. I hope you might help with getting this information to the public and maybe encourage the adherence to best practices.

Given the close proximity of baseball playing fields, the Rose Garden Park, Nitschmann school grounds, Municipal golf course, and other public spaces, I would like to know the health risks to people of contaminated dust that can settle and be kicked up. Will the city, DEP or some other agency monitor the soil after the implosion?

Barbara

Gadfly reminds followers that email links to the Mayor and City Council are on the sidebar for easy access.