

Can you say “no” to a developer?

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Gadfly's posts, Uncategorized January 17, 2019

(17th in a series of posts on City Government)

Followers might have noticed Gadfly wrestling a bit about how he should feel about developers.

Let me tell you a story.

Gadfly began shadowing city meetings one year ago, January 2018. He described it as “auditing,” as one might do in college, going from meeting to meeting getting a sense of what was going on in each. He found the historic commissions most interesting of all. Sometimes bigger projects, but sometimes discussion and decisions were about the color of paint, the height of lettering, the script on a sign. Fascinating in the commissioners’ attention to detail.

Immediately in January he watched Philadelphia developer Robin Reshetar pitch renovations for the Grace Mansion, 114 W. 4th. Having worked on the Southside, Gadfly knew the property well. There even used to be a restaurant there at one time.

The developer described his knowledge of and substantial portfolio in [historical renovation](#). Conversations with commissioners was always cordial and thoughtful. Reshetar presented plans on [January 22](#), [February 26](#), especially [April 16](#), where you can find great [images of his proposed work](#).



Gadfly watched the commissioners work with national guidelines (the property has an historical designation) and local historical district guidelines. Each time, Gadfly repeats, the interactions were cordial and thoughtful. The developer listened and came back twice with revised plans. The commission hesitated on his most developed plans, which included town houses. [Take a look](#).

Gadfly wondered about past history with the property. He assumed that there had been other developers who looked promising but eventually disappointed. Here was one who looked very interested, who had invested in several rounds of plans. As I sat there on the sidelines, I worried that the commission was going to chase him away.

But they stuck to their principles.

And, yes, he disappeared.

I felt a sense of loss. I wondered how the commissioners took it. Would, then, the Grace Mansion continue to decay? Perhaps never to be saved. Would it have been better to bend a bit to save the place?

Must have been on some level a tough decision for the commissioners.

But they stuck to their principles.

And six months later another developer – Dallas Basha, only two years out of college — showed up and now renovation is moving along.

Nicole Radzievich, “What’s on tap for Bethlehem’s other Grace mansion?”

Morning Call, November 20, 2019.

Historic Conservation Commission November 19

Lehigh University Brown and White

I’d like the moral of my story to be that you can say “no” to developers for the right reasons, and everything will eventually turn out ok.
Gadfly didn’t see a happy ending here.