

Pilot study to consider closing a portion of Packer Ave. in front of Lehigh U

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 Latest in a series of posts about Lehigh University and the Southside



**Public meeting from 6 to 8 p.m. Jan. 23 at the
Broughal Middle School Auditorium**

Nicole Radzievich, “Should Bethlehem close this major street near Lehigh University?” Morning Call, January 16, 2020.

Lehigh University wants to close a portion of Packer Avenue for 45 days this spring, a move aimed at making its south Bethlehem campus more pedestrian-friendly.

The temporary closure, between Vine and Webster streets, would run between March 9 and April 30. During that time, officials would assess the impact on parking, traffic patterns and pedestrians on that section of Packer that brushes Lehigh’s Asa Packer campus.

Lehigh says about 1,200 people cross that street daily, and the Bethlehem Parking Authority operates metered parking there. Lehigh says that about 85% of those vehicles parked along that stretch are affiliated with the university.

Lehigh plans to present its plans at public meeting from 6 to 8 p.m. Jan. 23 at the Broughal Middle School Auditorium. City Council would ultimately have to decide on the closure.

Mayor Robert Donchez said he supports the study but has not taken a position on the permanent closure of that section of Packer Avenue. He said he would like to see whether the cars that had been parking in the metered spots will spill into the neighborhoods. He also had questions about how the loss of parking meter revenue will impact the parking authority.

He said the move could build upon a larger effort of Lehigh's to blend the campus into the south Bethlehem community. In recent years, Lehigh has contributed money toward the beautification of South New Street. Lehigh has moved into offices at the Flat Iron building and the Gateway at Greenway Park building attached to the South New Street garage.

Adrienne McNeil, Lehigh University's assistant vice president of community and regional affairs, said limiting traffic on that part of the street would help bring the campus closer to the downtown and would be another step in a yearslong effort to make the campus more pedestrian-friendly and environmentally sustainable.

Lehigh has been revamping its transportation system. In the last year, the shuttle buses have been making stops every 10 minutes from 6 a.m. to 2 a.m. and added stops at Farrington, Vine and Webster streets. Three additional shuttles were introduced as part of the effort.

McNeil said ridership has doubled on campus, and the university has moved to a zoned permit structure where parking permits are only good for certain areas of the campus during the peak times.

to be continued . . .