

Need for student housing regulation long recognized — Now's the time — Please “sign on”

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [Neighborhoods, Southside](#) October 21, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on the Southside* 

ref: [“Important meeting Thursday on regulating student housing to protect Southside neighborhood”](#)

ref: [“Here’s how everybody can help protect the Southside neighborhood”](#)

ref: [“More information on the proposal to regulate student housing”](#)

ref: **[“Please sign letter supporting proposal to regulate student housing”](#)**

When the collective works of Stephen Antalics — Gadfly #1 — are published, researchers of Bethlehem history will find abundant evidence of this warrior’s dogged battles for preserving the quality of Southside neighborhoods around Lehigh addressed in the ordinance coming before the City Council Community Development Committee Thursday evening.

Who can forget Gadfly #1’s descriptions during public comment at City Council meetings of the cancer that has ravaged the Southside as a result of City zoning decisions.

And here below this Gadfly directs you to just two of Gadfly #1’s printed works on this subject that bookend the last decade.

So now before City Council is a fair, reasonable, well researched, collegially developed ordinance that aims to regulate student housing in a way that preserves the quality of life in those Southside neighborhoods.

And we’re asking a wide swath of the Bethlehem residents to show City Council the strength of support for this long aborning ordinance.

To show that support, you can:

- add your name to a letter to Council from affordable housing advocates throughout our community: [CLICK HERE](#) to read and sign.



and/or

- speak at the October 22nd Community Development Committee meeting in support of the proposal: you can sign up in advance or call (610) 997-7963 when the chair asks for public comment. If you would like to sign up to speak, email the following information to the Bethlehem City Clerk's office (cityclerk@bethlehem-pa.gov) no later than 2:00 PM on October 22, 2020 (a) name; (b) address; (c) phone number; and (d) topic of comments. If you are signed up to speak, the Committee Chair will call you from (610) 997-7963.

2012

Selections from Stephen Antalics, "Bethlehem should revisit its zoning ordinance." Morning Call, September 4, 2012.

For a city to maintain an environment of stability, safety and a sense of well-being in the community, its zoning ordinance must require a high ratio of family-owned residences compared to rental properties owned by nonresident landlords. This helps reduce transiency, and the high percentage of family homes also adds to a collective civic pride — an essential community element.

The Bethlehem South Side master plan in 2001 recommended that the area would benefit from more family-owned properties and fewer rentals. That hasn't happened. The city's zoning ordinance, adopted May 7, allows up to five unrelated people living together in one unit. This zoning designation encourages property owners to rent to Lehigh University students and others. Families, however, bring stability to a neighborhood.

Why does the Bethlehem administration not change its recent zoning revisions to be in line with other communities? Could not the South Side have a limited student overlay district immediately adjacent to the campus allowing five students, while rental properties outside that district are restricted to two unrelated persons? This would make rentals available to traditional families,

2019

Selections from Stephen Antalics, “Student housing conversions harming Bethlehem’s South Side.” Morning Call, July 27, 2019.

In the late 1980s, Bethlehem revised its zoning code to allow up to five unrelated individuals to be recognized as a family and live in one housing unit. According to Jeffrey R. Zettlemoyer, who at that time was the fair housing and labor compliance officer for the city, the increase was an incentive for more student housing conversions.

If one were to time-travel back to the mid-1980s prior to the zoning revision, and drive the streets of the core residential section of the South Side, streets such as Carlton, Montclair, Birkel, Vine, Webster, Polk, Morton, Summit, Fillmore, Thomas, Taylor, Adams, Hillside and Pierce, you would see predominantly well-kept pristine single-family homes resplendent with grass green yards of flower and vegetable gardens and well-appointed porches.

Taking that trip today would reveal houses with large placards stating “Student Housing,” backyards with macadam surfaces to allow for overflow parking, alleys such as Boyce and Boyer streets appearing to be massive parking lots and two or three industrial-sized refuse containers on sidewalks before most houses.

Sidewalks are littered with cups and food containers after loud weekend parties. Bed sheets with messages are strung from second-story windows rallying athletic teams to victory over rivals, creating a college campus atmosphere on the city streets. A rather depressing annual sight is to see groups of people scavenging through piles of discards left by students who have departed for summer vacation. The absence of students and

the absence of cars parked on the street gives some streets the appearance of a deserted city.

[you can sign the supporting letter here](#)