

# Gadfly Quixote Tilting Again (3)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Gadfly's posts, Lehigh University, Serious Issues October 17, 2018

*(3rd in a series of posts on Lehigh University)*

Hi Darlene:

So I offered my two cents about Lehigh U and the Lehigh parking lot again at Council last night. Last week at Planning, I couldn't see Tracy because of the posters, but – ha! — you looked like your chair was on fire – and I thought you were going to jump out and come after me. But this is the kind of thing that jangles Gadfly nerves. I hope you understand. I'm guessing that Lehigh will next be before Planning again on the College of Health at Adams and Morton. I would like to see Lehigh lay out in more detail the aspects of their Parking study relating to off-campus parking (have you guys seen their study?). And I'm copying Adrienne Washington and the Planning Board with this letter in case I miss the next time Lehigh appears. If I'm not there, maybe somebody will have this letter or remember my concerns. I did not catch the name of the Lehigh vice-president present last week, but I assume Adrienne can share with him.

1) I'm wondering about Lehigh's use of that Northside lot now and possible more need for off-campus parking in the future. At a previous City board meeting (I forget which one, I hang around a lot of them!), Adrienne said the parking study showed the campus could absorb the lost parking spaces. I got up and questioned whether by campus she was including the upper and over campuses. She said yes. *I'm sure she said the "campus" could absorb all lost parking spaces due to construction.* I worked on that lower campus for almost 50 years and always thought of parking as tight. I went to work earlier and earlier in the morning (like before 7AM) when I drove (I was mainly a walker) in order to get a parking space close to my building. From my window I could see colleagues circling several times hoping for an open space. We would joke about it – "there he goes again!" So I always thought parking tight and questioned Adrienne. I couldn't see how the lower campus would function if parking was taken away there, and thus I asked if she was saying that there would always be spaces available somewhere across all our campuses. *I'm sure she said the campus could absorb all lost parking spaces due to construction.* No mention of off campus parking. Therefore, I was surprised to hear about the 150 spaces in the "Northside Commuter Lot." So what happened? I think we should clearly

understand openly what's going on here. And, further, I think we should clearly understand openly if there will be additional off-campus parking needs. It looks to me like the "Path to Prominence" is being phased in over several years. Is the 150 spaces the current need that will need to be augmented as the Lehigh plan hits full stride? The estimate of lost spaces is over 800 total, larger by 100 spaces than our largest garage, 1/3 larger than the new New St. garage. That's a lot of spaces that Lehigh self-consciously designed to lose. I'm not sure the City should be bailing Lehigh out. And if the City has a better use for that lot. A Gadfly poster reports that the lot was constructed using CDBG funding during the City's 250th Anniversary to provide parking for users of the Sand Island amenities such as the Towpath and Ice House.

2) This one is squarely in Gadfly's mission. Gadfly looks out for the common folk. Let's back up for a minute. Lehigh parking will now be highly regulated — location-based parking and all of that. Faculty and staff will have some choice. Parking on lower campus will now cost \$500/yr., and there is free parking on the other side of Stabler arena (the moon) and in the Northside Commuter lot (3/4's of a mile from the lowest part of lower campus). Parkers in the NCL will be bused to Farrington Square (the lowest point of lower campus) where they will connect with another bus if their workplace is farther up-campus (the type bus is also of interest to me, but that is for another day). Lehigh must have made some conclusions about whether the spaces on campus would fill, thus forcing some people into the free lot. Lehigh must have made some calculations about the possibility that the free lot would fill before satisfying the demand. What happens then? Lehigh also must have made some conclusions of who would choose the free lots. That's all info that should be laid out. Here's why. On the surface, common sense tells you that low wage workers (graduate student teaching and research assistants, adjunct faculty often working at other places too, cafeteria-grounds-cleaning people), not able to afford \$500, would, of necessity, choose the free lot and put up with added inconvenience that in some cases, according to my estimates, might add 80-90 minutes to their work day. Actually, the admin at the information session I attended didn't know if the cafeteria-grounds-cleaning people were even considered Lehigh staff under this plan since they actually work for Sodexo and places like that. So that is a key question. Where do these low-wage, non-union, probably overwhelmingly minority people fit into the plan? These people will be Bethlehem residents and tax payers to a large extent and

vulnerable – they can not question, can not rock the boat. Somebody has to make sure they are treated fairly. Some probably work at night when the parking will not be so regulated and thus might not be a problem. But there may be no problems here at all. Gadflies just are by nature jittery. I just think Lehigh should simply lay it out to show that they have considered some important issues, especially people issues, especially Bethlehem people issues. And that we know if there is any impact on our residents and taxpayers. The end of the conversation between the Lehigh lawyer and your Gadfly at Planning last week was classic, he saying Lehigh had complied with all the rules and regulations, your humble Gadfly, sounding like Jimmy Stewart in an old Capra movie, ventured something corny like “Waallll (can you hear the Stewart imitation?), there’s law and there’s concern for people.”

Simple explanations could probably answer all these questions. But I think they should be asked. I am always careful to frame my annoying gadflyness with how great the Lehigh plan is. No question there.

I have a thread on this on the Gadfly blog, and I am hoping that you will keep me in the loop, so that I can keep the ever-growing number of followers posted. In fact, direct contributions by City folk and or Lehigh folk would be very welcome. Adrienne told me she looks in on Gadfly once in a while. Others might need to be reminded:

<https://thebethlehemgadfly.com/>

Fight the good fight, as I always say—

Ed