

# DCED Director Karner: “We found ourselves at the whim of decisions beyond our control”

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [Southside](#) November 1, 2020

 *The latest in a series of posts on the Southside* 

So much going on nationally, right?

But Gadfly doesn't want to lose sight of the important proposal to regulate student housing in the city of particular importance to the Southside that was discussed in an open meeting of the Community Development Committee October 22.

Quantitative public interest in this proposal was high. The quality of comments at the meeting was very high.

About 20 residents called in, overwhelmingly in favor of the new ordinance. Gadfly covered the **few negative comments** a week or so ago.

Gadfly supported the proposal in a series of posts leading up to the meeting. Click **Southside** under Topics on the right-side sidebar.

And at the meeting itself Gadfly called attention to the potential — finally — for a kind of marriage of a long line of resident agitation on the one hand and a long line of verbal commitment to supporting affordable housing by Council on the other in a specific proposal that could be acted upon (2 mins.).

Gadfly likes to give primacy to arguments opposed to him, but logically he should have started with the City's presentation of its case for the proposal.

Therefore, he'll call your attention now to these introductory remarks by Director of Community and Economic Development Alicia Miller Karner in which she lays out the timeline of events from 2014 when she took office to the present (10 mins.).

**Audio Player not available in this archive**

Karner said that presenting this proposal before a Council committee was not the usual process, and she seemed to indicate that a public hearing might be held in the future. So Gadfly is not sure of the future process, for Council members talked of getting the proposal before Council quickly. Perhaps Council would hold the public hearing since the Zoning Board has already passed on the proposal. In any event, Gadfly was surprised that there was not more comment October 22 from business interests and that there was no Lehigh University voice either. So maybe we'll hear more later.

But Karner laid out a helpful timeline of events and meetings and consultants beginning in 2014 when she took office. For instance, she described meeting quarterly with Lehigh from 2014 to 2017, a time in which 200 new rental licenses were issued in that area. She described various, shifting Lehigh University announcements, signals, and plans. She described how confusing Lehigh messages about their plans spurred investors. She described a 2018 consultant report that pointed out that the proliferation of rental signage (see Gadfly's [Tour de Rentz](#)) was an unintended message that families weren't welcome as well as an invitation to criminals. She described the City's "vulnerability" to decisions out of its control and described the proposal as a solution to an issue that has "dominated conversations in my office for six years." There are now 623 regulated rental units in the area.

Karner laid a good ground work for discussion of details of the proposal in which both she and Planning director Darlene Heller then engaged.

Gadfly will post about public support for the proposal by beginning with perhaps the most unusual, the most striking example of that support — from a resident who left the city because of the conditions the proposal is designed to address.

We know articulate Murdock Saunders already from appearances on Gadfly describing the conditions of and the dangers to his upper Hillside Ave. residence.



[“Meet the ‘Bethlehem Residents for Responsible Development’”](#)

July 17, 2019

Now, however, Saunders has regretfully moved away, a casualty of the rental creep. “Don’t let more families like us leave,” he counsels Council (1.5 mins.).

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