

“We are hoping that . . . our concerns will be taken seriously”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Armory October 12, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on the Armory* 

Gadfly:

You are probably familiar with the Redevelopment Project of the Armory on the West Side of Bethlehem.

Our neighborhood has been fighting for years to make sure that this massive redevelopment does not diminish our quality of life. Although we welcomed the redevelopment, we were hoping that the city would only allow a project that respected the historic character of our neighborhood and that contributed to the community. Although there were some offers from various developers, finally the city favored John Callahan’s and Peron’s plans.

The reality is that years ago when Callahan first introduced this project to our neighborhood, he was pitching it like a modest redevelopment with three-story buildings. Sadly, after many meetings, the city allowed the developers to have an absurd amount of 11 variances, disregarding every single concern of the neighbors who asked the city to reconsider this decision during several meetings.

Sadly, the construction started last Monday, and so far this is what has been happening. Many of our houses are extremely close to the redevelopment site. Since construction started, our walls, foundations, and windows have been shaking.

[Listen [here](#) for the sound of the construction.]

As you probably already know, this would not be the first time that unchecked construction damaged local homes, which was the case a few years ago when work at Holy Family Manor (on Prospect Ave.) damaged surrounding historic homes. Most of our houses are more



than 100 years old. We are deeply concerned about the immediate and long-term damage that this MASSIVE construction will have on our foundations, old pipes, walls, etc.

During past meetings with the city, Peron expressed that they would take measures to protect our homes. However, since day one, our homes have been shaking.

In addition, there is a cloud of dust in the area, which is a health concern, especially for people with respiratory conditions, which is a major problem during this COVID 19 pandemic. The developers have done nothing to mitigate this.

These two items, along with the constant noise and heavy traffic, are creating substantial stress for the near neighbors and rapidly deteriorating the quality of our lives.

Last week, an inspector from Code Enforcement came to visit our neighborhood and the construction site. It was disheartening to hear him say that, basically, there is not much we can do as homeowners, except to take pictures and document the situation. This will quickly become a very dreadful task, considering that this construction is projected to take from 12 to 18 months.

As neighbors of the city of Bethlehem, we would hope that the job of the city is to assure the well-being of its taxpayers. However, when you see that a developer is allowed to claim 11 variances when an average person has an extremely difficult time to just ask for one, when our quality of life has abruptly deteriorated so much in such a small amount of time—and it is just going to get worst from now on—we can't help but wonder, who is benefiting from all of these decisions? What is certain about all of this is that absolutely no one is watching out for what is best for this community.

We are hoping that the city will protect our interests and that, indeed, our concerns will be taken seriously. After all, this is a massive burden that the city of Bethlehem has placed upon our neighborhood, and we will have to live with the consequences of this decision for the rest of our lives. However, based on the fact that through all of these years, they

have placed the interest of developers above the safety and well-being of the citizens of Bethlehem, we have very little faith that it will happen.

Because of that, we are asking the city to send someone immediately to ensure that proper measures are taken to ensure the safety of the surrounding properties. In addition, we are asking the city to check, periodically, the foundations, surroundings, and pipes of the houses around the construction area through the next couple of years to make sure that no damage has been inflicted as a consequence of this construction now and in the future.

We are also asking the city to make sure that the developer respects every single detail of the plans that were approved and that no liberties are taken.

As simple homeowners, we have no real way to ensure that our homes will be safe without paying thousands of dollars. We are trying to draw some attention to this issue, hoping that the city and the developers will take our concerns into serious consideration.

*The Gadfly, too, hopes that the City can do something to allay community concern. The very first words that Gadfly-before-he-was-Gadfly spoke at City Council were about this issue early in 2018, and the treatment of the community he witnessed over this issue planted the seeds of his Gadflyness. See **“Armory”** under Topics on the right-hand sidebar for posts relating to a meeting of the Planning Commission a year ago in which, in Gadfly’s opinion, concerns of the Armory neighbors were politely listened to but totally dismissed.*