


# Reposted from February 11: Gadfly thinks Lehigh strikes out on the Packer proposal

The Bethlehem Gadfly Lehigh University, Southside February 17, 2020 4 Minutes

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

“Gadfly is not *demanding* that Council completely reject the street closing. He’s asking they *demand* Lehigh make a compelling case. A case that compels them.”

Gadfly, February 11, 2020

*City Council tomorrow night will vote to enable the closing of Packer Avenue between Webster and Vine for a traffic study that will be a key determinant in the decision about a permanent closing. Gadfly has taken some heat for opposing the street closing. He hastens to say that he has an open mind on that decision. What he opposes is going ahead in even a preliminary fashion without a compelling case. Council needs to require convincing argument before it acts. Gadfly could fashion such a convincing argument. He challenges Lehigh to do so. And he challenges Council to withhold approval for the pilot study till they do so. And thus he reposts his thoughts from February 11.*

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As you can see from the [video in Gadfly’s previous post](#), at the February 4 Council meeting Lehigh presented three rationales for the Packer street vacation as it did January 23 at Broughal, but the rationales were not the same. Rationale #2 was different February 4. But rationales #1 and #3 were no stronger.

Lehigh presented “three major issues overlapping one another”:

## **1) safety of pedestrians:**

Lehigh simply presented some facts about the number of Lehigh pedestrians who cross Packer Ave. The number is “substantial.” But the number of pedestrians crossing a street, even though huge, doesn’t logically prove there is a safety problem. What *would* prove there is a

safety problem? Facts. Number of accidents. Number of injuries. Number of deaths. No data has been given. Where are the facts? Has the City recognized the central crossing of Packer as a danger? If so, why have they not recommended some remedy? Even if the data backs up a significant safety issue, have any number of other traffic calming tools been applied? Why go immediately to the most drastic option? The answer probably is that the three rationales are “overlapping,” and the most drastic option enables goal 3: [a Packer Promenade](#) of some sort. Without the successful completion of rationale #1, there can be no Promenade. Gadfly sees the promenade as Lehigh’s main goal.

## **2) the changing face of the Lehigh campus as it shifts downward toward Southside:**

The downward shift is partly due to projects on campus but partly due to “our *investment* in the city.” Investment. That is, we have put money in. Note that this rationale #2 is not the same as the rationale #2 that was presented at Broughal. At Broughal, the stated rationale was “Better connecting Lehigh with South Bethlehem to have more [foot] traffic supporting the businesses” — the change is a recognition that no logical connection could be made between Packer open or closed and foot traffic at Southside businesses. Now no mention of impact on business is made. What is mentioned is money Lehigh has spent. That’s a big difference. Lehigh had to shift the argument. (Maybe they *were* reading Gadfly!) And in the shift we find a bald quid pro quo (wheee!). Now Lehigh reminds the City of their “investment” in the Southside and their “partnership” in developing it. In effect, they are saying remember what we’ve done for you and with you. Now it’s time for you to do us a favor. In addition, there is the completely new element of opening up a “point of connection” with the Southside but not in the north-south direction of the prior rationale #2 but in an “east-west” direction. This is the first time we hear of an east-west connection with the Southside as a Lehigh or City goal. But what is there to connect east-west? North-south was connection with businesses and other understandable aspects of city life. What’s the point, function, goal of an increased east-west connection even if it could be shown that closing the street would effect one?

## **3) improving the pedestrian experience not only for the Lehigh community but the public at large:**

Value for the Lehigh community is obvious. But for the public at large — which should be the Mayor and City Council’s prime concern — it is not. How much east-west “public” foot traffic is there? Gadfly is tempted to say virtually none. But are there any facts? Is there any data? There is no expansion on this third point. No rhetorical support. No elaboration. No description. No argumentation. No example. No persuasion.

Which for Gadfly adds up to *no reason* for City Council to approve even so preliminary and costless a step as a traffic study.

In Gadfly’s view, Lehigh has demonstrably not made a case with enough mental rigor for even a baby step to be taken toward closing Packer Ave.

It’s hard for Gadfly to see that closing Packer Ave. was on any City agenda in the same way as, say, refurbishing South New St. But let the case be made. Strongly. Before any action is taken.

(Gadfly wants to note among all his negativity that Lehigh indicated response to concerns about Broughal safety and expanding the area of the traffic study raised at the January 23 meeting, as well as commitment to shutting down the study/closure early if things aren’t working out. These are good things.)

*to be continued . . .*