

Gadfly's Tour de Rentz: from Hillside to First Terrace

The Bethlehem Gadfly Affordable Housing, Neighborhoods, Serious Issues, Southside July 31, 2019

(Latest post on such topics as Neighborhoods, Southside, Affordable Housing)

Remember, Gadfly urges you — *wherever you live in the City* — to email Seth Moglen (moglen@lehigh.edu) as an act of solidarity and to get your name on the mailing list of Bethlehem Residents for Responsible Development.

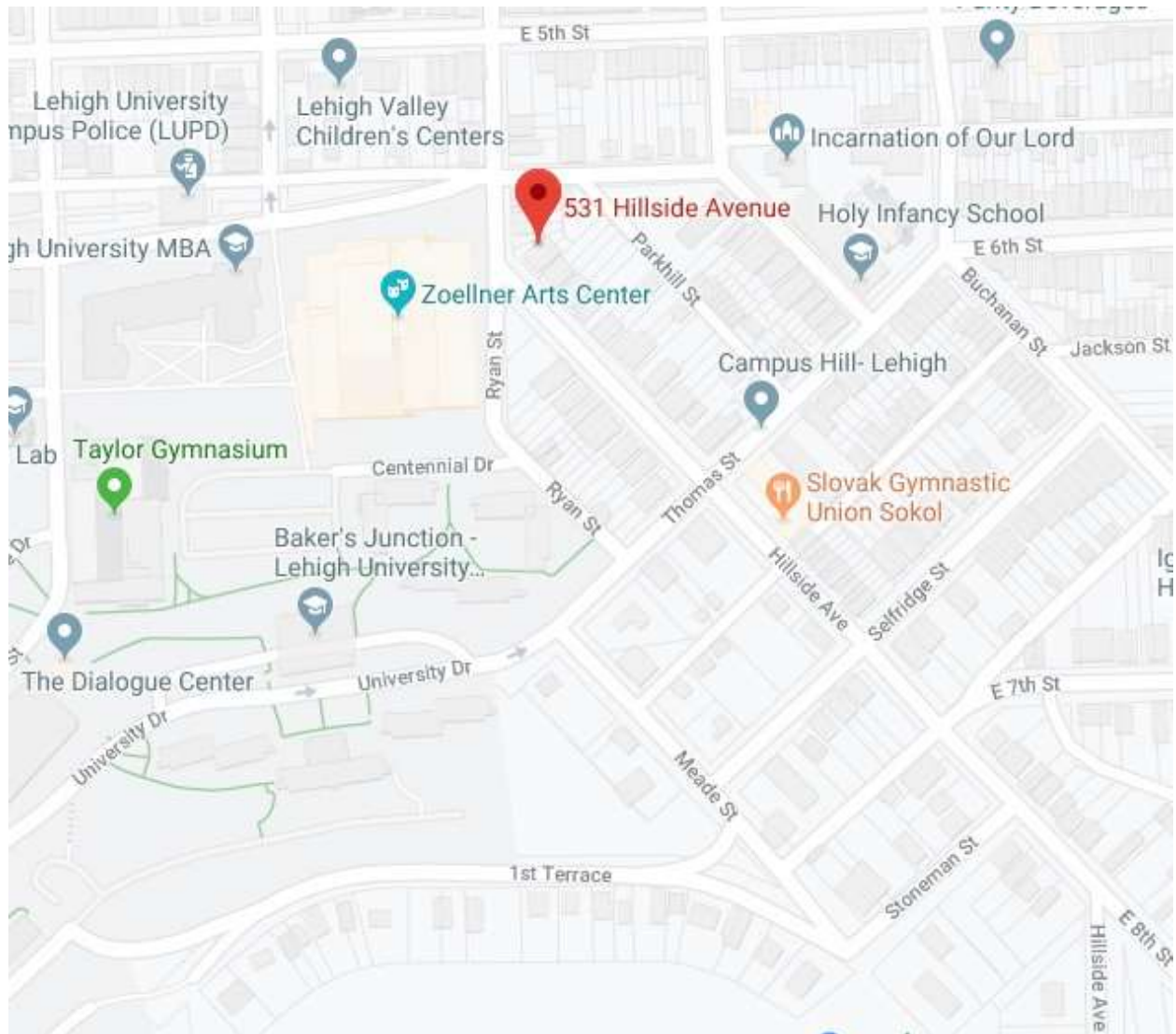
Gadfly had to see for himself. He had long heard tales of Southside woe from Olga Negron and Stephen Antalics. He recently heard resident fears of the spectre of “lower Hillside” spreading upward with devastating impact. There was even talk of “existential crisis.” How could this be?

Time for Gadfly to follow his own principle. Time to look at the primary sources.

Gadfly's *Tour de Rentz* starts at the foot of Hillside Ave. (approx at 531 Hillside Ave.) alongside the Zoellner Arts Center Parking Garage. It proceeds up Hillside past Thomas and Selfridge, turning on Stoneman, and ending on First Terrace.

Join him. The videos linked below are only a few seconds each.

If you know this neighborhood at all, you probably know it speeding through in a car. Let's slow down. The *Tour de Rentz* is on foot.



1) **Foot of Hillside Ave:** looking up the hill, student housing as far as you can see. Just about every house “signed.” The few beautifully full trees left may be an indication that at one time this was a handsome tree-lined street.

2) **North (east) side of Hillside:** we begin moving up on “lower Hillside,” the heavily dense student-housing section that residents of “upper Hillside” fear is in their future.

3) South (west) side of Hillside: Gadfly is struck by the long string of interesting looking houses. One can easily imagine that they were once comfortable family homes.

4) Farther up on the south (west) side of Hillside: Gadfly admits to being something of a “romantic,” but he was taken by the look of these houses — big living room windows, nice porches, once tree-lined. And the porches up high. He talked with a guy perched far above the sidewalk as he passed — lord of all he surveyed. Gadfly had to crane his neck. A feeling of the first floor on the second floor. Interesting.

5) Turning right off Hillside, south on Thomas, uphill into the Lehigh campus: Gadfly quietly orgasmic at the beautiful double that meets him. What an interesting twin. A sense of size and sturdiness. Gadfly quietly admitting to himself that he expected not to be impressed by the original quality of the homes. Gadfly quietly feeling shame at what has happened here to what once were “homes.”.

6) Turning left off Hillside, north on Thomas: looks like an apartment house, was this relatively newly built? Looks out of place with surroundings. Looks clean and nice — but out of place. Doesn't seem to blend.

7) Back up Hillside again: encountering a “pod” of rentals on the north (east) side, a whole block that collapsed from familytude. Gadfly imagines the male householder drifting down to the Sokols for a brew or two.

8) Turning right off Hillside, south (uphill) on Selfridge: 4 out of 5 houses on the block are rentals, the corner property owner looks to be holding on to a cute house. Gadfly imagines tension in that corner house.

9) **Turning left off Hillside, north on Selfridge:** look at the fence and stone work on the double next to the corner house. Interesting. Gadfly getting more of an appreciation for the art of building houses on hills. Steep hills.

10) **We reach upper Hillside:** now predominantly homeowners, but rentals have made a breach. A kind of border crossing here. Gadfly wishes his camera had lingered more on the northside homes along Hillside here.

11) **Upper Hillside:** (Lousy video.) Not dominated by rentals. Yet. Solitary rental property on the right with trash in front faces well kept, flowered home with a guy gardening on the left. Not a pretty composite picture. Like a spot on a lung of this stretch of neighborhood.

12) **Turning right (south), uphill, off Hillside on Stoneman:** houses owned by Lehigh Properties, of the recent case about a 40-student dorm on First Terrace before the Planning Commission.

13) **Gadfly quizzed separately by an adult and two students** about what he was up to. They are fidgety, guilty looking. Suspicious of me. And a bit snarky. Gadfly thought it best not to incite by filming the encounters. Gadfly life expectancies are short as it is.

14) **Turning right off the top of Stoneman on to First Terrace:** this the spot where Lehigh Properties wants to build a 40-student dorm, knocking down 4 homes to do so. Remember that residents made a determined argument against the proposal in front of the Planning Commission to no avail — but that the Mayor broke the norm and effectively shot down the proposal. But what alternative lurks?

15) **Farther along on First Terrace past the 4 houses proposed for demolition to build a large dorm:** privately owned homes, signs of care

for the houses, signs of domesticity, flowers, gardens, neat lawns, this is *a neighborhood*. So clear that the proposed dormitory development was dead wrong. Did the developer have any regard at all?

16) Farther yet on First Terrace: view across the Valley, unfortunately not video'd, an exhilarating top of the mountain feel. More clear signs of home care, more clear signs that this is *a neighborhood* — clear signs of the domestic life endangered by the rental scourge creeping up from below.

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Please forgive Gadfly the poopy camera skills. He could name one faithful follower who should have had the job.