

Mayoral candidate Grubb responds to the Armory neighbors

The Bethlehem Gadfly Candidates for election, Election, Gadfly Forum March 25, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts on the Gadfly Forum* 

ref: [Gadfly mayoral forum #2: development](#)

ref: [Addendum #1 to Gadfly forum on development: the Armory](#)

Dear Gadfly,

The intrusion that the Armory project has become to a quiet Bethlehem neighborhood is the perfect example of the kind of development that Bethlehem doesn't need. It reminds me of Cinderella's stepsisters trying to jam their oversized feet into the tiny glass slipper.

I support redeveloping this site but will repeat again my Mayoral review criteria for projects in Bethlehem and address each point as it relates to this specific site.

“As Mayor, when a proposed project is brought to my attention I will have a series of questions and checklist for the developers of those projects:

1. How will your project benefit Bethlehem and the neighborhood in which you're locating?
2. Have you met with the surrounding residents and property owners? How do they feel about your project?
3. How many and what variances will you be seeking? Are you in compliance with all city ordinances?
4. What if any assistance do you need from City Hall?
5. Are your taxes current on all of the real estate that you own in Bethlehem? Are your properties in good condition and code compliant? We want to make sure that you are a responsible property owner.

6. What are the parking needs for your project and how will they be addressed? Are you stressing an already existing short supply of parking?
7. What is the environmental impact of any proposed demolition and/or the actual project?"

It is apparent that since construction started this neighborhood has been negatively impacted by an oversized development designed to maximize return on investment at the expense of those already living in this area. I've driven past it several times. I would not want this happening in my own neighborhood. I empathize with the neighbors' plight. I'm not privy to any "inside deals" between city government and the developer, but my administration will be more demanding when it comes to scale, mass, and parking.

Neighborhood meetings were held, but from what I've seen and heard they appeared to focus on disseminating information rather than gathering, and listening to, input. It also doesn't help when a former Bethlehem Mayor arrives representing a development that he personally profits from. Was he really listening to any concerns, or just paying lip service?

The number of zoning variances requested was exorbitant. When a project is scaled properly for its setting it won't require this many variances.

The developer received assistance from the city when government conveyed one half of a boulevard-like roadway to the project. I'm less concerned with the loss of half of the roadway than I am with the reason for it: parking. I've questioned from the start why parking isn't being built beneath the project to provide some relief from its parking demand on the neighborhood streets. A less dense redevelopment of this site would have eased this concern. We still don't know what the end use of the Armory portion of the project will be and what parking demand will be incurred.

Why weren't condos or owner-occupied town houses considered? I don't recall any conversation about affordable housing units.

While I have no reason to doubt that this developer is exemplary with regard to their “good citizen” standing, my administration will routinely verify that on taxes and property maintenance for other holdings.

Finally, there is a plethora of environmental concerns with this project. Construction and demolition debris filling a landfill, air quality, noise, vibrations from demolition and site preparation, are again all impacted by the project’s scope.

I will finish by addressing the City’s role of providing community support to the already existing residents. Simply put, the residents were there first. Every possible accommodation, demonstration of support, and application of inspection enforcement will be a priority for my administration.

My opponent for Mayor has taken campaign contributions from the primary developers in Bethlehem: I do not and will not. Therefore, I am at liberty to work in the best interests of the public. I can be fair, negotiate in good faith to bring the best development possible into Bethlehem, and do it in a way that allows us all to “believe in a better Bethlehem.”