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LETTER: With high-rise plan, Bethlehem City Council abandoning successful historic strategies

Print (http://blog.lehighvalleylive.com/opinion_impact/print.html?entry=2014/11/letter_with_high-rise_plan_bet.html)

<http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/expressletters/index.html> By Express-Times Letters to the Editor (<http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/expressletters/posts.html>) on November 13, 2014 at 2:02 PM, updated November 13, 2014 at 2:07 PM

The question was simple: Is a **nine-story building historically appropriate** (http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/bethlehem/index.ssf/2014/11/bethlehem_city) in the midst of a commercial district characterized by two- and three-story buildings? Only two out of Bethlehem's City Council members tackled this question head on, the others breezed quickly by it and spoke instead about visions of "economic development" and "getting people downtown." This flew in the face of the legal advice they'd just been given by the council solicitor (to focus their vote on historic appropriateness), and it showed a dramatic disregard for the residents and business owners who spoke to the value of the historic conservation district that includes the corner of Fourth and Vine Streets.

It also represents a troubling break from the community revitalization strategies that have served the city so well. "For over 40 years, Bethlehem has leveraged its historic assets to create jobs, attract tourist spending and generate tax revenues" (Historic Preservation Plan, page 33). The neighborhood that includes the proposed development site is already the city's most densely populated. Building bigger is not the answer. Building from strengths -- capitalizing on the neighborhood's historic assets, the investments already made by its existing businesses, and the guidelines laid out in its existing regulations and plans (the same strategy that has proven so successful on the North Side) -- is right one.

Karen Beck Pooley
Bethlehem

http://www.facebook.com/sharer.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.lehighvalleylive.com%2Fopinion%2Findex.ssf%2F2014%2F11%2Fletter_with_high-rise_plan_bet.html) (http://twitter.com/share?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.lehighvalleylive.com%2Fopinion%2Findex.ssf%2F2014%2F11%2Fletter_with_high-rise_plan_bet.html) (<mailto:>)

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This south side area densely packed with buildings that height. Facker Memorial is 185 feet. The Fritz Engineering Labs are 8 stories (over 100 feet), the Mudd Building is 6 stories, and the newest building at Lehigh, the STEPS building is quite high as well. Also, there are historic and not so historic public buildings in the area that are mid-rises. There's the Flatiron building at 6 stories (built in 1911), the Rooney building at 14 stories (built 1979), and the Litzenberger House at 8 stories (built 1969). As you can see there are plenty of buildings in the area that are well over 2-3 stories. You mentioned that the south side is already dense, but this is a GOOD thing. Density allows for sustainable and walkable communities. With greater density, residents are able to walk to amenities in their neighborhoods and public transit becomes more efficient. High rise buildings such as this are also more efficient than low rise buildings. In addition, a high rise allows us to keep open space where it is needed (and belongs) and avoid suburban-style sprawl in our urban cores. I believe the building design has taken into consideration the height, by having step backs as the building ascends. If we never allow buildings in our urban cores to be higher than 2-3 stories, that would defeat the purpose of having urban cores where there is sufficient density to create sustainable, walkable, and livable neighborhoods. Let's continue to add density to Bethlehem's 2 downtowns and make them both great places to live/work/play.

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The Fritz Engineering Labs are 8 stories (over 100 feet), the Mudd Building is 6 stories, and the newest building at Lehigh, the STEPS building is quite high as well. Also, there are historic and not so historic public buildings in the area that are mid-rises. There's the Flatiron building at 6 stories (built in 1911), the Rooney building at 14 stories (built 1979), and the Litzenberger House at 8 stories (built 1969). As you can see there are plenty of buildings in the area that are well over 2-3 stories. You mentioned that the south side is already dense, but this is a GOOD thing. Density allows for sustainable and walkable communities. With greater density, residents are able to walk to amenities in their neighborhoods and public transit becomes more efficient. High rise buildings such as this are also more efficient than low rise buildings. In addition, a high rise allows us to keep open space where it is needed (and belongs) and avoid suburban-style sprawl in our urban cores. I believe the building design has taken into consideration the height, by having step backs as the building ascends. If we never allow buildings in our urban cores to be higher than 2-3 stories, that would defeat the purpose of having urban cores where there is sufficient density to create sustainable, walkable, and livable neighborhoods. Let's continue to add density to Bethlehem's 2 downtowns and make them both great places to live/work/play.

2  

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 **Kaddidlehopper** (<http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/Kaddidlehopper/index.html>) Nov 14, 2014
(<http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/Kaddidlehopper/index.html>)
@bethcitizen And every one of those buildings was built before the historic district was created, save one, which is five stories tall. National register historic districts are created with a purpose. They enhance property values, encourage reinvestment in existing structures and strongly help to maintain quality of life in those cities in which they exist.

Increasing density also comes with its set of problems including traffic, increased pollution, higher crime, and in this case the project does not seem to be an alternative to urban sprawl.

You say that increased density allows people to walk to amenities. The writer points out that the area where this project is proposed is already the most densely populated in Bethlehem. Cannot those people already there walk to neighborhood amenities?


Your arguments are full of holes, much like Swiss cheese.

Would it be okay for a developer to purchase a building next to the Moravian Book Shop, raze it, and then build a nine story edifice in its place?

I think not, yet it's alright to do that in the poor old south side of the city.

Like Reply

Uncle Remus Nov 14, 2014

 Yet another woe is me and the south side comment

Like Reply

 **Itsallamystery** (<http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/Itsallamystery/index.html>)

Nov 14, 2014
@Uncle Remus Crawl back into your hole Remus. I didn't read a single "woe is me" sentiment into that remark.

Like Reply

 **Uncle Remus** Nov 14, 2014

Possibly because you can't understand too well

Like Reply

 **lowUSmathscores** (<http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/survivaloftheadaptable/index.html>)


Nov 14, 2014
What's wrong with placing a nine story building across the street from the Moravian Book Shop?


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Nov 14, 2014
@lowUSmathscores (<http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/survivaloftheadaptable/index.html>) Try it and see how the community reacts. It won't be pretty.

Like Reply

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