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comments

Your comments: Bethlehem City Council finds a 'high-rise loophole' in historic zoning



A view of developer Dennis Benner's proposed 9-story apartment building at West Fourth and Vine streets in South Bethlehem. (Courtesy image)

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 (<http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/staff/flaag/index.html>) By **Jim Flaag**/opinion editor (<http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/staff/flaag/posts.html>)
Email the author

on November 06, 2014 at 2:45 PM, updated November 06, 2014 at 3:00 PM

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Did Bethlehem City Council

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make a good call in [approving the design of a 9-story apartment building](http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/bethlehem/index.ssf/2014/11/bethlehem_city_council_approves_design_of_9_story_apartment_building_in_historic_conservation_district_on_south_side_or_did_it_trash_the_very_meaning_of_historic/)

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in an historic conservation district on South Side -- or did it trash the very meaning of "historic?"

There is considerable debate on this point. Council voted 4-2 to allow the high-rise at West Fourth and Vine streets, after hearing objections from more than 30 residents. Council members Bryan Callahan, Eric Evans, Michael Recchiuti and J. William Reynolds cast their votes for the design.

Council members Cathy Reuscher and Adam Waldron voted "no," noting that most surrounding properties are two- and three-story buildings. They argued that council had ample grounds under the [historic conservation zoning](http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/bethlehem/index.ssf/2014/10/south_bethlehem_historic_board.html) to reject the plan, which would have required developer Dennis Benner to retool his design.

Council was tasked with judging the building's historic appropriateness -- not the economic impact or tax revenue that would be generated by a high-rise, opponents said. Some worried that council is paving the way for a cluster of tall buildings in the district near Lehigh University; Benner has plans to build 13-story and 7-story buildings nearby.

Here's a sampling of the online response to staffer Lynn Olanoff's coverage of Wednesday's council meeting:

luengineer

<http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/luengineer/index.html>) wrote:

The Solicitor should have called them on the carpet when council started injecting economic considerations into the discussion. This is typical Bethlehem City Council stuff whereby Benner has bought them all off over the objections of the people. This is similar to the Sands project decision wherein Council followed the money instead of the will of the people they are elected to represent. This decision needs to be litigated with a lawsuit against council decision process.

Brian18018

<http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/Brian18018/index.html>) spoke up for this type of development:

Finally, common sense prevailing. Projects like this are good for a city looking to stay atop of the Lehigh Valley as trendy, progressive and keeping the city on par to remain proactive in reaching younger professionals, keeping them in the city and keeping their money here. Lets retain professional people. This project does that.

All the NIMBYS who will allow the city to fall behind and remain uncompetitive. Geez!!

Itsallamystery

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

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responded:

Please explain to me how this project, which is supposed to include student housing and a trendy first floor restaurant, retains young professionals. I'd also like to know how Bethlehem falls behind if it doesn't have a nine story building at this location.

no1trhlfan

(http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/no1trhlfan/index.html) added:

Yes, all the young professionals to fill all those high paying jobs produced with all the development on the South Side. Waiting tables at a restaurant is mighty professional !

peterkc (http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/peterkc/index.html)

wrote: I am no longer surprised by the council's willingness to do things that are bad for the community, but this went beyond the normal. Before they voted, one of the council members asked if the vote was to deal only with historic appropriateness; their own solicitor instructed them that was correct. Before voting, several of them rationalized their plans to support the proposal saying that they had to look at the economic impacts. In doing so, they not only violate their own ordinance but state law.

And this, from **macwnj (http://connect./user/macwnj/index.html)**:

Three words: follow the money.



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Nov 7, 2014

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Brian18018 (http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/Brian18018/index.html)
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Nov 6, 2014

Jim, unfortunately, you will get the same few people who comment on the same topic expressing the same discontent with this project.

Anything that can improve the city, be designed to meet the requirements, replace existing dilapidated buildings, bring additional tax base, people who spend money and more life to an area cannot be viewed anyway but positively.

Bethlehem will continue to progress and replace outdated underused properties. It's the right way to go.

Plus, there are higher buildings that already exist in that area, large steeples etc and they all add to the skyline of the south side.

2 **(http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/The_Crackdown/index.html)**

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Nov 6, 2014

Copy of council minutes are not consistent about how residents really feel. Just put a few bucks in my pocket and I will give you the world. THEY SHOULD BE ASHAMED !

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Brian18018 (http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/Brian18018/index.html)
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Nov 6, 2014

Btw... I am a resident and I support the project. Glad to see council moving the city forward.

2 **(http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/The_Crackdown/index.html)**

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