Residents oppose south Bethlehem parking garage

They maintain $17.75 million structure will only benefit one developer

Randy Kraft, WFMZ.com Reporter, RKraft@wfmz.com

Posted: 5:19 AM EST Mar 02, 2016
Updated: 1:12 PM EST Mar 02, 2016

Resident Al Wurth addresses Bethlehem City Council

A small group of residents who oppose a $17.75-million parking garage proposed in south Bethlehem again took their fight to City Council Tuesday night.

They were responding to a Parking Demand & Feasibility Study, dated Feb. 24, that was done for the Bethlehem Parking Authority by Desman Design Management, a New York City consulting company.

The residents argued that study shows a parking garage is not needed on the Southside, that such a garage will only benefit one developer and that building it will cost the city more than $1 million a year in debt payments for the next 30 years.

The study focused on existing and future parking needs only in an area of south Bethlehem bounded by Second Street on the north, Packer Avenue on the south, Webster Street on the east and Brodhead Avenue on the west.

The parking authority plans to build a six-level parking garage with 626 spaces at the corner of South New and Rink streets.

The proposed garage will stand between — and provide parking for — a six-story building developer.
Dennis Benner plans to erect at Third and New streets and a larger building he proposes building on the north side of Fourth Street.

That parking garage will cost about $17,750,000, according to the study.

“I want to know why tax dollars should be supporting Dennis Benner’s buildings.” said resident Breena Holland.

“I want to know why we have a study focused on the needs of two buildings owned by one person. That just seems desperately wrong to me.”

Resident Kim Carrell-Smith said the Benner high-rise proposed on Fourth Street “is an as-yet unapproved development dream.”

She said the parking garage “is designed to support the dreams of one guy.”

“Please slow down and reconsider this,” Carrell-Smith asked City Council. “Take a moment to breathe, look away from the shiny objects of the developer’s dreams and see what’s really needed on the Southside.”

Resident Peter Crownfield asked council: “When you see a proposal like this, are you embarrassed? Outraged? Do you find it absurd that anyone would propose anything so stupid?”

“Don’t be one of the last cities in the United States to do a mid-20th-century bad idea in the 21st Century, when everybody is rethinking the whole idea,” appealed resident Al Wurth to City Council.

“Look to what a leading city is trying to do instead of what people did 50 years ago.”

Most of the same residents also spoke out against the proposed parking garage at a Jan. 19 City Council meeting.

“The parking study is even more discouraging and depressing than I was afraid it might be when it finally came to light,” said Wurth Tuesday. He said the study “gives official figures that support our original skepticism.”

Wurth said the study shows the parking garage will cost the city more than $1 million a year for 30 years “because of the debt service that it takes to build it. This is a big white elephant money loser.”

“You’re talking about losing a million dollars a year to benefit one developer,” said Crownfield. “This is stupid. This is ridiculous.”

To pay for the project, predicted Wurth, “every parking meter is going to cost more and everybody’s going to pay more fines and every other business is going to subsidize Mr. Benner’s two giant buildings.”

Council president calls for public conversation

After several residents spoke about the issue Tuesday, council president William Reynolds twice emphasized he disagrees “with a lot of what the speakers said.”

However, he recommended the city administration and parking authority should have “a public conversation” to “lay out all this information at the same time.”

He said that would be the easiest way to talk about all the positive and negatives of the parking garage proposal, including the debt that will be incurred.
Cash 5 Jackpot of $600,000 Won in Somerset County

MIDDLETOWN, Pa., Thu, Mar 31 2016 10:15 AM

Powerball Ticket Worth $100,000 Sold in Allegheny County

MIDDLETOWN, Pa., Thu, Mar 31 2016 10:06 AM

Olympus Plasma Prostate Resection System Is Recommended by National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)

CENTER VALLEY, Pa., Wed, Mar 30 2016 8:30 AM

AlertBot Celebrates 10th Year of Website Monitoring

ALLENTOWN, Pa., Wed, Mar 30 2016 6:45 AM

Air Products to Broadcast Second Quarter Earnings Teleconference on April 28

LEHIGH VALLEY, Pa., Tue, Mar 29 2016 3:00 PM

Kitchen Magic Again Earns Esteemed 2015 Angie's List Super Service Award

NAZARETH, Pa., Tue, Mar 29 2016 8:30 AM

More Local Headlines from PR Newswire
Pugilistas del Indios Boxing Gym buscan brillar en los Guantes...
www.wfmz.com

Old Hess mansion in Allentown for sale
www.wfmz.com

David Cassidy charged in Florida mishap
www.wfmz.com

Police investigation at the Sands Hotel
www.wfmz.com