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

Did Bethlehem City Council make a good call in approving the design of a 9-story apartment building 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 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](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 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.

Brian8018 ([http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/Brian8018/index.html](http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/Brian8018/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. Gee!!

Itsallamystery ([http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/Itsallamystery/index.html](http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/Itsallamystery/index.html))
Three words: follow the money.

And this, from no1trhlfan (http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/no1trhlfan/index.html):

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! Three words: follow the money.

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

Three words: follow the money.

Brian18018 (http://connect.lehighvalleylive.com/user/Brian18018/index.html):

Money talks BS walks!

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

Of the three, 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.

Three words: follow the money.