

Councilman Callahan's coup de gras: bar Councilwoman Van Wirt from acting on Parking Authority matters

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Ethics, Serious Issues December 6, 2019

🔗 *Latest in a series of posts on Ethics and City Government* 🔗

Councilman Reynolds here refines the basis for his motion to relieve Councilman Callahan as liaison to the Parking Authority by focusing on conflict of interest, that is, BGC's advocacy for the proposal of the company for whom his brother works: it doesn't matter that you didn't have a vote; it doesn't matter that you may disagree with your brother a lot; it does matter that you promoted a plan from which your brother would benefit.

https://youtu.be/_lr2C7Vu2wM

- It's not about criticizing [the Polk Street project].
- Your brother [John Callahan] was a great Mayor, and there are great projects that they are doing in the City of Bethlehem.
- They don't look nearly as good when you advocate for them.
- Our behavior is not just determined by whether or not we vote, but it's whether or not we advocate, how we have conversations . . .
- This is more about whether or not . . . the way you handled yourself is representative of this particular body.
- It doesn't matter if you disagree with somebody that you are related to nine times in a row, it doesn't make it any better to be able to advocate for any individual project.

- [You can believe that that report was biased but] I'm hard pressed to find that that's an appropriate comment when somebody in your family is the one who benefits from this.
- As far as representing City Council to another entity, I believe the point has been made.

Councilman Callahan does not address Councilman Reynolds's conflict of interest argument but stresses the context of AMK's actions, that is, the recent corruption cases in Allentown and Reading, as the reason for his concern. He denies any active involvement in the BPA decision, indicating — as he has done many times — that he prefers to discuss matters out in the open, in public at Council meetings. And he ends — doing what he also has done many times — implying, without elaboration or specifics, that a Council member was acting “backstage.”

<https://youtu.be/mEapnTuuXN4>

- I had no input in that [BPA] decision [on the Polk Street Garage].
- I did not speak at the meeting.
- I had no conversations with anyone on the Parking Authority that was voting.
- I had no voting rights there.
- And as I have said numerous times, I prefer to handle things here in front of this body instead of backstage.
- I feel . . . that in the wake of Allentown and Reading for [AMK] to make that phone call on the day of the vote and try to persuade people on the Board to go with Nova . . . I thought that was unethical.
- I feel in the wake of Allentown and Reading again, everybody's sensors were up.
- My comments that I made were made here, I wasn't hiding anything.

- I didn't make any phone calls behind the scenes early in the morning.

Councilman Callahan offers to resign as Parking Authority liaison, but Council progresses with Councilman Reynolds's motion to relieve him by Council action, and the motion passes 5-2 (Councilman Colon voting with Councilman Callahan). BGC again references a kind of predetermined plot by JWR, but in a dramatic *coup de gras* BGC asks that Councilwoman Van Wirt be barred from discussion or voting regarding the BPA because of an easement she has with them on her home property. What's fair is fair, he claims. Gadfly doesn't understand the correlation. Gadfly cannot understand this move by BGC at all. Anyone who has paid even the barest attention knows that PVW has been at virtually continual loggerheads with the BPA. To suggest favoritism, if that's what BGC is doing, because of a deal in her benefit makes no sense. Very odd behavior, if you ask the Gadfly. This final move by BGC is an attempt to turn tables, to attempt to slur PVW, to intimate — what? — possible unethical behavior, possible conflict of interest on her part? Council doesn't even stop to acknowledge much less consider BGC's request.

<https://youtu.be/88n0sdCbQX8>

- Obviously this was something Mr. Reynolds was working on
- I resign as liaison to the Parking Authority.
- I think parking is a very important thing in the City of Bethlehem.
- I would ask from this point on that Dr. Van Wirt not vote or have any discussion on anything dealing with the Parking Authority due to a easement that you have with the Parking Authority for access to your garage.
- I mean, if we're going to be fair, we're going to be fair.

to be continued . . .