

“Where is the public in this process?”

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government August 5, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on City Government* 

If Gadfly’s memory serves him well (Prevagen addict), Greg Zahm’s comments at City Council last night were the third in a row on basically the same topic.

He had “continued grave concerns about the Community Engagement Initiative and its process,” since there was no “opportunity for thorough public discussion and input into the content and format” of the CEI.

Perhaps his comments can best be summed up by “Where is the public in this process?” and “We need better outreach.”

Greg enumerated five specific points:

- 1) Why was the public excluded from this process?
- 2) Why did Council turn its responsibility over to the Mayor, the Administration, and the police?
- 3) Do the public partners have any apparent role in implementation?
- 4) Why is the appropriateness of the participants and invitees to be determined by the Mayor and his administration and not a committee that would include Council and public partners?
- 5) Are we using the same narrow digital portals for publicizing the upcoming August 11 meeting? There are other ways to reach out to the public. What are you doing to improve on involving the public?

These are themes close to Gadfly’s heart.

Gadfly wonders how “we” are publicizing the August 11 Public Safety Committee meeting. The piece in today’s Bethlehem Press is a dry-as-

dust press release. We need the public stoked about the potential great significance of the police and CEI discussion.

Anna Smith's "We have an opportunity to do something truly momentous" still plays in his head. He'd like to see tee-shirts.

Greg touched on a basic Gadfly confusion about who's in charge when he read from the Reynolds/Crampsie Smith resolution: "City Council of the City of Bethlehem *urges the Mayor and his Administration* to collaborate with the City of Bethlehem Police Department to create a public space and forum for the long-term discussion of issues. . . . The Community Engagement Initiative might include and/or interface *with any individuals or entities that the Mayor and his Administration think appropriate* such as"

Gadfly is a writing teacher. The resolution says the Mayor et al is the driver of the CEI. The Mayor et al is "urged" to create a forum, and the Mayor et al is given the choice of participants. That's what the resolution says. Greg is right.

Why is Council acting as if in charge? Councilwoman Crampsie Smith has for two meetings lamented confusion in the public sphere that she cannot understand. Well, there's my confusion.

Who's in charge?

Grrr.