

Gadfly thinking about Thursday's Committee of the Whole meeting

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [Police](#) October 26, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police* 

“We should take this opportunity for self-reflection and to critique ourselves, and if necessary implement constructive recommendations that will continue to make the Bethlehem Police Department the best in the Lehigh Valley.”

Mayor Donchez, August 11, 2020

“Capt. Kott will no doubt bring a new perspective and energy to the department. . . . She’s a strong advocate of community policing, partnerships, and she has additional training in the areas of mental health, cultural awareness, de-escalation tactics, implicit bias training and crisis intervention.”

Mayor Donchez, September 23, 2020

The Mayor has requested a City Council Committee of the Whole meeting for this Thursday October 29 at 6PM.

The topic: Interaction of the Police Department/Health Bureau/Recreation/Department of Community and Economic Development.

Gadfly is not sure what the Mayor has in mind for this meeting. He assumes it is at least in part if not totally a response to the murder of George Floyd. And he looks forward to the meeting being productive.

Gadfly can't be sure, but he doesn't think it will be the kind of meeting (or series of meetings) he has been thinking about, one which is a more in-depth conversation about the Police Department itself.

Both the Mayor and the then Police Chief quickly made good statements subsequent to the Floyd murder, and the City was quick to produce relevant statistics and reports.

But neither statement indicated using the moment of the murder for an internal taking stock of the way the department does its business. There was no indication that this was a time for internal self-analysis. The Mayor indicated that he would be listening for good ideas, by which he seemed to mean from the outside. Gadfly, in fact, remembers the Chief ascribing the level of violence used by officers to the level of violence offered by subjects, which completely missed the point of the “mental health” issue in some subjects where tragedies occur that the Floyd death has foregrounded.

Gadfly implies nothing negative about our police department. Indeed, the fact that our department undertook a rigorous review and reform subsequent to the Hirko case a generation ago and now has a rather unique dual accreditation is very impressive and much to be applauded.

But Gadfly envisions a more “politic” statement subsequent to the Floyd murder along the lines of “we” (the City/Police Department) feel confident we are ship-shape but still “we” (from the inside) are going to take this cultural moment of public concern to do self-analysis anyway just to be sure and to be able to further instill confidence in the public about the way we do business.

And Gadfly can envision a City Council saying we recognize the accredited stature of the department and we imply nothing negative about its policies and procedures, but it is our responsibility to respond to this cultural moment by holding the kind of public conversation about issues that the Floyd murder have highlighted and which we have never had before.

So in his statement above about new Chief Kott, the Mayor indicates some specific topics for self-analysis and for those conversations: community policing, partnerships, mental health, cultural awareness, de-escalation tactics, implicit bias training, and crisis intervention.

A syllabus to which you have seen Gadfly in past posts adding recruiting and diversity hiring, promotion practices, internal discipline, residency incentives, the role of the Union in personnel matters, a citizen review board.

The department made various statistics public. Gadfly, remembering that Prof Ochs saw things there that others didn't, wonders about seeking outside professional viewpoints on those statistics.

And Gadfly would certainly like to hear a detailed plan for involving the police in the Community Engagement Initiative since they are the "key factor" in its success.

Gadfly hopes that any changes that might be contemplated during Thursday's meeting are more than just cosmetic.

Gadfly hears the tough words by a commenter at Council (was it July 7?) to the effect that we don't need more pizza parties.

Your ideas, as always, invited.