

Council candidates on a homeless issue proposal

The Bethlehem Gadfly Candidates for election, Election May 16, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts on candidates for election* 

selections from Douglas Graves, “Bethlehem City Council candidates.” Bethlehem Press, May 14, 2021.

Would or would you not support the concept of housing homeless people in “tiny homes” with communal dining and bathrooms within the city limits of Bethlehem? If so, where exactly would you recommend such a project be located? If not, can you explain why not?

Kwiatek: I am a proponent of the “housing first” philosophy of addressing homelessness. There are myriad reasons why a person could be unsheltered, from mental illness and drug addiction to fleeing an unsafe home. By helping them find shelter first, their other challenges can be addressed from a starting point of stability. Tiny homes with some communal spaces could be one solution, however, there are other approaches being tried in other cities that could also be effective. In Santa Fe, New Mexico, a city of a similar size, the city bought an old hotel and used federal funds to renovate it so that each person actually had more of their own apartment rather than having to share dining and bathroom spaces. Like Bethlehem, the Santa Fe government partners with non-profit agencies with the expertise to provide services and support. Having experienced the way in which COVID spread rapidly in communal living situations, providing housing options without shared space could be preferable. With regard to location, I believe such a facility could and should co-exist in any neighborhood. Our unsheltered residents are members of our community.

Leon: If tiny homes have proven successful this option should be explored, in an accessible to pedestrian’s part of the city.

Callahan: I would support using Federal Housing and Urban Renewal funds to build more affordable housing for the needy.

Crampsie Smith: As a member of the NAACP Advisory Council, I serve on the Homelessness Sub-Committee and we are currently discussing ‘tiny homes’ as an option. I believe we must have a continuum of initiatives re: homelessness and housing. We need a permanent shelter for folks who are homeless as we are the only city in the Valley to not have one. Our sub-committee is working on this! We also need to develop transitional as well as permanent housing. “Tiny homes” could be a viable model however, we need to do more research into this option. While it has worked in some areas, some things to consider are: can we provide more housing units in a multi-level building versus a ‘tiny homes community; what is the life span of a “tiny home”; would this option be deemed as segregation; where is the best location; and what is the input of those who are homeless and/or transient?”

Wilhelm: While thoughtful research is needed in terms of determining a specific location, a community of tiny homes-which provides a mailing address, safe shelter, food, and other resources designed to scaffold residents toward living independently-is an option worth our consideration as we care for our unhoused neighbors.