

Council Candidates – 4-year seat – Prompt 3 (24)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Candidates for election, Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues April 13, 2019

(24th in a series of posts on candidates for election)

*BCDC is hosting a candidates' forum May 6, 6PM, at Steelworkers Hall,
53 E. Lehigh St.*

Election Day is May 21.

Order in which contributions were received this time.

Vote for three.

All of the candidates deserve our thanks!

Please expand on one of the points that you listed in response to question #2.



J. William Reynolds (incumbent)

NorthSide 2027 is an initiative that encompasses the work that we need to continue to pursue in Bethlehem. Bringing together the Bethlehem Area School District, Moravian

College, citizens, small businesses, and City Hall, we are trying to invest in and revitalize our neighborhoods with a comprehensive approach to community development. In the past year, we have brought together neighborhood stakeholders, hired a consultant, held public meetings, and gathered ideas relating to the strengths and weaknesses of our north side neighborhoods. As the initial plan nears completion, the implementation of the neighborhood strategies will be one of my priorities if elected to another term.

Different priorities for different neighbors have emerged during the planning process for NS2027. While that can be a challenge, it also holds the potential for the initiative to bring together neighbors for a shared, unique purpose. Projects such as the Bethlehem Food Co-op give us the opportunity to make structural investments that can positively impact the future of our city's families.

Improving our community's connections with our neighborhood elementary schools, making our neighborhoods more walkable, and improving opportunities for our families are all priorities that will be important tenets of the NS2027 plan moving forward. As important as the priorities of the "plan" are, however, I am hoping that the legacy of the plan will be the permanent structure of interested community stakeholders that has been created, engaged, and empowered.

Bethlehem families' lives are often intertwined between our school district, city government, the physical space of their neighborhoods, and the businesses/services that are within walking distance of their home. As a city, we owe it to our neighborhoods to look through that interconnected lens if we are going to maintain and improve the quality of life that has always made Bethlehem special.



David Saltzer

I am happy to follow up on my statement in last week's edition that, as a city council member, my first and foremost goal is to make Bethlehem a safe city for our residents, visitors, and employees. As a retired City of Bethlehem Firefighter who had to retire early due to an on-the-job injury, I believe strongly in upholding the motto of public safety workers — Everyone goes home.

I've worked in a multitude of emergency services facets, starting at age 16 as a volunteer firefighter and EMT, and later becoming a 911 dispatcher and, in 1999, an acting supervisor. Through these experiences, I gained a first-hand understanding of what goes into the everyday aspect of each job. I also have a firm understanding and knowledge related to negotiating with the city administration and council on topics such as safe staffing levels for fire, police and EMS, and making sure that first responders have working equipment to do their jobs. I understand the budgeting of these items and the cost factor that accompanies them; however, what is the cost of a life? For first responders and their families, this is a common worry. For those not close to the job, sometimes strains related to emergency services staffing levels and equipment shortages seem not as dire. With ongoing cuts to the fire department's staffing levels, our aging and outdated equipment, and fleets of vehicles that may or may not work, the job becomes more difficult and it makes it much more complicated to keep fellow firefighters, residents, and visitors safe. A further complication to the above is the inability to retain fully-trained public safety workers in the city when they can take their experience to another municipality or township and make better wages, while working in an environment with more secure staffing levels and better equipment. For example, our city paramedics are top-notch but must work at multiple places just to make ends meet. These men and women clock in and may not see the station again until they go home and are highly under-appreciated. These are things that need to change. I also

feel, as a 911 dispatcher and acting supervisor since 1999, I would be a key person to aid in the facilitation of the ongoing transition of our 911 system going to Northampton County. I have input and ideas to help with a much smoother transition than how it is occurring currently. My last part of the plan that I would like to see is a joint public safety training facility for fire, police, and EMS—a place to train that isn't in a parking lot somewhere. This isn't a new idea and has been talked about at length before, but it has never materialized. I'd also like to look at other opportunities for employee recruitment and retention, such as the apprenticeship program that Allentown Fire Department uses. Together, these elements I outlined: safe staffing, working and upgraded equipment, a better- functioning 911 center, and proper training will help keep this city one of the safest in the country for its residents, visitors, and employees.



Paige Van Wirt (incumbent)

Gadfly, in answering your questions, I have been thinking a lot about Jane Jacobs. Jacobs, an urbanist, changed the way city planning was understood in America. In her book *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, written in 1961, Ms. Jacobs challenged the status quo of large, shiny projects, arguing for eyes on the street and human scale. “At a time when both common and inspired wisdom called for bulldozing slums and opening up city space, Ms. Jacobs’s prescription was ever more diversity, density and dynamism – in effect, to crowd people and activities together in a jumping, joyous urban jumble.” NYT, 2006.

Bethlehem is in the same type of moment as New York City in Jacobs’ day — do we continue with auto-centric thinking for our two downtowns? How do we create a city where people want to walk — for recreation, for exercise, for work? A city in which people want to walk creates a human scale and that elusive but magical word — community. Walkability doesn’t mean shaming people into not driving — just the opposite. It means understanding the “jumping joyous urban jumble” and how to foster development that honors the humans in the downtown, rather than a Corbu-inspired “tower in the park” idealism. We see it playing out every day as our beautiful city is appreciated by investors — how do we capture this energy and steer it to create a city

where we all want to be? It means having a plan and expecting others who want to invest here to honor a city's vision for itself.

One of Jacobs' epic battles was with Robert Moses, the powerful chairman of the NYC Parks Commission. Moses favored highways over public transit. He saw his efforts in placing the Cross Bronx expressway in the middle of a vivid working-class neighborhood as "slum clearing." She successfully fought his efforts to do the same to her beloved Greenwich village, by defeating the Lower Manhattan Expressway ripping through the heart of the village. Bethlehem is at a pivot point where we can continue to look at our city through old paradigms of "any development is good development," or we can take Jacobs' philosophy to heart locally and understand that when change comes to our beautiful city, it should be shaped and guided by principles that value the human, the public, the citizens of Bethlehem.



Michael Colon (incumbent)

Last time I mentioned I want City Hall to continue to have the resources to meet the needs of our community. Since I've been on Council we've consolidated departments (Recreation and Public Works), eliminated departments (911 moving out of the city), and cut a few positions (various departments). The primary function of local government is to deliver core services: police, fire, EMS, public works (streets), water, sewer, and community and economic development. City Hall is currently seeing its lowest staffing levels anyone can remember. This makes the delivery of services all the more challenging.

These moves and decisions are usually made during the budget process, which makes Council's role in adopting a budget so important. However taxes are also raised during the budget process. All policies, agendas, programs, etc. have a cost associated with them. Bethlehem has been fortunate to maintain the delivery of services while only adopting modest tax increases the last few years.

At the end of the day that's what I hear most from citizens, "Don't raise my taxes." What is implicit is the understanding that citizens still want a police officer nearby when they need one, their street maintained, a firefighter on standby in case of an emergency, and someone at City Hall to help them when they call or walk-in.

The budget process is tedious, it is complex, and it always has to be balanced. What I will continue to do is look at it comprehensively each budget season to balance the needs of our city and neighborhoods with the resources we have at our disposable.



Carol Ritter

Carol has an excused absence from d'professor.



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