

“It’s contentious out there”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Parking, Serious Issues October 3, 2019

(129th in a series of posts on parking)

Here’s something to think about over your morning Dunkin’.

What jobs would you not like to have?

On that list might well be PEO –Parking Enforcement Officer.

Parking violation tickets have risen 300% in the last 5 years.

It’s not that there are more PEO’s on patrol — more people are breaking the law.

“It’s contentious out there,” said the Bethlehem Parking Authority exec director at Tuesday’s meeting with the Public Safety Committee when he was proposing an increase in the fine structure as a stronger deterrent, a proposal that was tabled.

“It’s contentious out there.”

Gadfly said yesterday that he found this meeting very interesting on several fronts and suggested that you listen in.

The topic of human behavior and how to change human behavior and maybe — ha! — if you can change human behavior especially got him thinking.

What makes getting a parking ticket so horrendous? And often so out of proportion to the money involved.

What makes the interaction with a PEO in the act of giving you a ticket so volatile?

“It’s contentious out there.”

So listen to a minute or two of Councilman Reynolds here:

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“The biggest complaint that we hear is the interaction of getting a parking ticket . . . We need to do something that limits those interactions . . . We need to do something that reduces how parking tickets are written?”

Agree?

What would you suggest?

Sara Satullo, “240% jump in parking tickets shows drivers are rolling the dice in Bethlehem, parking authority says.” lehighvalleylive.com, October 1, 2019.

The Bethlehem Parking Authority’s leader first asked to raise its parking violation fines in 2014. The authority issued about 22,940 tickets that same year. Five years later, forgetting to feed your meter still only lands you a \$10 parking ticket in Bethlehem. But the authority wrote 78,000 tickets in 2018 and is on track to write about 82,000 this year.

[“The current fine schedule is not penal enough to encourage motorists to simply pay for parking instead of breaking the law [because] the number of parking violation tickets issued over the past five years has increased by more than 300%

by the end of 2018.” BPA report]

That’s why authority Executive Director Kevin Livingston is appearing before Bethlehem City Council’s public safety committee at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday night to again ask council to raise fines \$5 to \$15 per violation.

In 2018, the authority again asked for a fine hike in concert with Mayor Bob Donchez’s decision to [raise meter rates 50-cents an hour](#) to \$1.50. Raising meter rates in concert with fines is meant to get more people to feed the meters, drive long-term visitors to park in garages and fund repairs and new parking garages.

Council refused to act on the request without more information on the new Polk Street garage and the potential for variable rate parking in the city. Livingston recently updated council on the authority’s plans for a new parking deck at Third and Polk streets.

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