

Follow-up to and fallout from the Zoning Board nomination controversy (2)

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Serious Issues September 6, 2019

(The latest in a series of posts on City government)

See the end of this post for good journalistic accounts to compare with and complement Gadfly's.

Under New Business at the September 3 City Council meeting Councilman Bryan Callahan's follow up to the August 20 meeting had four recognizable parts. Always go to the primary source. Listen before looking at Gadfly's summary. 12 minutes.

https://youtu.be/pYqub2iP_SU

1) BC outlined the support he received after the August 20 meeting. He extended thank you's to the people who reached out, the dozens of phone calls, the few emails, and the personal contacts — one couple saying that that was “probably the greatest meeting that they'd ever been to.” What he heard from literally dozens of people was “debate and open discussion is a good thing for the citizens.” Recently, he received a 40-minute phone call “out of the blue” from a “very distinguished,” longtime “servant in Northampton County,” well known to everybody, the upshot of which was that open debate was a good thing for the City.

2) BC indicated that he had heard from lawyers and solicitors from boroughs and Authorities with the advice that according to Roberts' Rules “in small settings you are allowed to direct comments to

individuals.” He asked for Solicitor John Spirk’s opinion of that, and the Solicitor agreed that, generally speaking, in small boards modifications for flexibility is allowed: “modifications to the rules permitting greater flexibility are commonly allowed for small boards” (boards numbering under 12).

3) Then, playing five or so excerpts from the audio recording of the August 20 meeting (for example, 1:18:37, 1:21:20), BC, calling in the Solicitor for corroboration, supported the claim that “we [meaning Councilpersons Reynolds and Van Wirt?] all have broken the rules” and that they did so in the meeting before he violated the rules [1:32:46] and weren’t called out for doing so. BC: “I want to play by the same rules as everybody else, but I don’t want to be called out on something that we all are doing,” and “I want to abide by whatever rules we decide [on]. . . . I want the rules to be applied evenly to everybody.” “All I’m asking for is if you are going to call me out out, please call out other people.”

4) Finally, BC apologized to Councilman Reynolds for getting personal, indicating that JWR triggered his personal response. “What I do regret is that around minute 1:30 Mr. Reynolds got personal with me and brought up a personal conversation that I had with him and that’s what I regret, and for that Mr. Reynolds, for my response back to you I apologize. . . . I felt it was political retribution, political revenge, and that’s why I . . . and I stand by that. . . . Mr. Reynolds, I apologize that me and you got personal last week, and for that I do apologize, but if you’re fair about it and go back and look at it, for the first 24 minutes I didn’t attack anybody.”

[Go to continuing video:](#)

Councilman Reynolds: “Apology accepted”

President Waldron: “I’m gonna try to enforce the rules moving forward fairly and consistently. That becomes challenging when rules are habitually broken, and I’m trying to give guidance and my guidance is pushed aside. I think everyone has a right to be heard, and I think they have a right to speak, from members of the public to members of Council. I’ve been criticized for having a light gavel in the past, and I can promise you I will continue to have a light gavel. I don’t think silencing people’s thoughts and opinions is a productive way to continue a conversation. With that being said, I do think there should be a level of decorum and respect for each other in the room. And I think at times at the last Council meeting that was not there. I did not get any feedback publicly that that was a positive conversation. In fact, many people reached out to me that I saw and said that it was cringe-worthy and it was embarrassing. I think the tone of that conversation wasn’t helpful, and it’s my opinion that I think we can do better and we must do better when we get in to the dangerous territory of accusing people of things on Council, whether that’s members of Council accusing each other of something or members of the public accusing, because that happens quite a lot, and I don’t gavel that down much the same way people go over the 5-minute time limit and I don’t gavel that down. I think people should be heard. Whether you agree with that opinion or not, the First Amendment is wide-ranging and it supersedes Roberts’ Rules of Order. But I would hope that we would have the respect for each other to adhere to those, so that the conversation can be productive. I hear a lot different kind of tone than I did last week, Mr. Callahan, and I appreciate that you were reflective on that, and I think open debate is a good thing. I think we should hold each other accountable for our thoughts and actions as well, and I think moving forward taking a little time to consider how our words are affecting other people in the room, it’s going to be beneficial. So I look forward to continuing this conversation publicly. Whether it’s warranted that people think the rules are being violated — Roberts’ Rules — which I think they are — I’m going to enforce them pretty liberally because I think the conversation should be open and fair, and I’m going to take remarks from members of Council if they want to give a little

course correction and think that I should enforce the rules a little differently. I'll listen to the majority of Council if they have a strong opinion that the rules should be enforced differently. Although I'm currently president of Council, I would welcome feedback from members of Council if they think I should have a different approach. And I'll try to balance those in the future as we continue these conversations under new business."

to be continued . . .

For other summary accounts of the meeting:

Stephen Althouse, "Bethlehem City Council reflects on meeting, adds council member." WFMZ.com, September 3, 2019.

Nicole Radzievich, "Bethlehem Councilman Bryan Callahan apologizes for rules violation, but says he wasn't lone violator." Morning Call, September 4, 2019.