

# Gadfly council forum #4: an innovative project

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [Candidates for election](#), [Election](#), [Forum](#), [Gadfly Forum](#) April 7, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts on the Gadfly Forum* 

## The Council candidates comparison chart

“The overarching issue is inclusiveness and transparency in our city government so that we can bring everyone together and move forward with a true sense of belonging as residents of Bethlehem.”

Hillary Kwiatek

“For me, the building of a homeless shelter would be of utmost importance. . . . I hope to focus on environmental justice. This focus will allow me to work with council members and our local nonprofits to address the need for a homeless shelter. . . . The matter of a homeless shelter is one that speaks to our humanity.”

Rachel Leon

“It’s crucial that we provide swift, equitable, and easily accessible funding to help our small businesses *stay* in business.”

Kiera Wilhelm

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### The prompt:

Bryan, Grace, Hillary, Rachel, Kiera:

In the first three forum prompts, I have given you the topics.

Let’s turn that around this time.

You get to choose the topic.

Attached you will find a comparison chart. I wanted voters to have a handy way of looking at you all at once. I filled in the blocks of the chart from your campaign literature or hearing you make presentations, or, with Bryan and Grace, simply from knowing what you’ve done. I have

tried to include what I have heard you identify as a campaign or platform issue.

Please pick one campaign or platform issue and elaborate on it.

What do you most look forward to working on in your term on Council?

Council members are problem solvers. What major problem would you like to work on either through the influence inherent in your position or through developing specific legislation — whether alone or, most likely, in coalition with fellow Councilors?

Elaborate. What is the problem? How is it affecting our residents? How did you become engaged in it? What will you have to learn about it? What preparation will you have to do? With whom will you need to engage? What will be your goal? How will you go about achieving the goal? How will you gain support from your Council colleagues? What outcome do you seek? What value to the residents in our city will your work have?

*Thanks for your service and your willingness to serve.*

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**Hillary Kwiatek**

**Grace Crampsie Smith**

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**Rachel Leon**

I would like to think that we all have an ethos, consciously or subconsciously, that guides how we make our decisions. For me, environmentalism is that ethos. In this time

of hyperpolarization, I believe that we can all agree on this one thing, there is only one planet Earth. For this reason,

whenever I make a decision, I think of how this might affect my family, my neighbors, my community down to the seventh generation. Understanding environmentalism as a platform is to truly understand what it means to be part of a community. It isn't just about planting more trees, although I believe we should. It isn't just about picking up litter, even though I love a good clean-up effort. Environmentalism is investing in local economies and supporting our small businesses. Environmentalism is addressing the placement of factories in our communities and how this affects already marginalized communities. Environmentalism is addressing access to nutritious food and affordable housing. When we put the health of our community at the core of our decisions, we can address the macro issues of environmentalism, like our air quality. We can make real change.

I think of affordable housing when I think of environmental issues. When we cannot find affordable housing, we are forced to move further away from our communities, adding to our overall emissions. I think of access to a full-service grocery and of members of our community who must drive 20 minutes just to pick up a few items during the week. I think of our homeless community members that are at a higher risk of experiencing environmental hazards. One thing I love about Bethlehem is that we have community organizations that work on issues like these. Our council has members that champion environmental issues and work diligently to address affordable housing. If I am afforded the opportunity to serve, I hope to work along side of them, and bring my unique perspective as a resident of South Bethlehem. For me, the building of a homeless shelter would be of utmost importance. This past year has shown us that, as a community, we are all connected. When we help our most marginalized community members, we help the community at large.

Environmental issues will be my driving force as I work with other council members. Although environmentalism is multifaceted, I hope to focus on environmental justice. This focus will allow me to work with council members and our local nonprofits to address the need for a homeless shelter and to address our air quality. I am already working with members of the community that have boots on the ground, so to speak, regarding these issues. The more I work with them, the more I learn about what has been successful in the past as well as what has not

worked. If we come together, the Council and the nonprofits that have already done much of the heavy lifting, we can come up with an effective plan that implements proven solutions. The matter of a homeless shelter is one that speaks to our humanity. It has support in our community. It is my hope that we can take the next steps and make it a reality.

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## **Kiera Wilhelm**

The meaningful relationships I have developed with small business owners in Bethlehem through my work at Fig have brought this community, and the issues they face, close to my heart. I have always admired, deeply, the extraordinary hard work and dedication it takes to launch a small business. But this past year, I have been in awe. Forced closures, capacity reductions, layoffs, complex and time-consuming grant applications, learning how to keep customers and staff safe in a pandemic—the list of unimaginable challenges goes on.



With over \$33 million of funding coming to Bethlehem through the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, the City will have the opportunity to provide desperately needed support to small business owners: to help them keep and hire back employees, provide debt relief, cover the cost of upgrades and strategies required to keep customers safe, and more. It's crucial that we provide swift, equitable, and easily accessible funding to help our small businesses *stay* in business. And not only the funding itself, but the guidance and information to help small business owners navigate the process of applying for and utilizing it. This involves direct communication with small business owners themselves and working closely with those already serving the important role of supporting our small business community—including our existing economic development team, organizations like CADCB, and individuals like Missy Hartney with the SouthSide Arts District and Tammy Wendling with the

Downtown Bethlehem Association (both of whom have worked tirelessly to guide our small business owners through the ever-shifting landscape of the past year).

We must look beyond the pandemic, as well. What do our small business owners need to succeed and feel supported by the City in the long term, and how can we better provide that support? What can we do to create an even more vibrant small business community? Can we improve practices with regard to inviting entrepreneurship and encouraging new small business owners to choose Bethlehem? How can we, as a City, more actively promote our local businesses? What mistakes have we made in the past, and how can we correct them? How can we make it as easy as possible for great small businesses to open, expand, and thrive—not just post-pandemic, but well into the future?

Small businesses are often referred to as the lifeblood of the US economy, for good reason. Spending that we do at local businesses helps our local economy. Small businesses create jobs, drive innovation, and enable us to purchase products made locally. And small business owners are members of our community, too. They are neighbors and friends; they know our favorite item on the menu, how we take our coffee. They, and the work they do, provide character and individuality to Bethlehem. They are invested, deeply, in what happens here. And the past year has challenged them like no other. Celebrating and supporting small business is more important than ever, and taking a greater role in helping our hard-working community of small business owners thrive—now and into the future—will be a great privilege and responsibility of my role on Bethlehem City Council.

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**Bryan Callahan**

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*Residents are welcome to fashion reflections on candidate comments, sending them to [ejg1@lehigh.edu](mailto:ejg1@lehigh.edu). On Gadfly we seek the good conversation that builds community, so please be courteous at all times. Gadfly retains the right to abridge and to edit your reflections and to*

*decline posts that are repetitive or that contain personal attacks. Gadfly will publish resident reflections on the week's Forum at noon on Friday*