## Gadfly #1 and Freedom of Speech at Council, and Three Requests (4)

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues January 8, 2019

(4th in a series of posts on City Government)

## Don't cut time citizens can speak at meetings

Bethlehem Councilman Gordon Mowrer has proposed limiting all citizen input during "courtesy of the floor" at City Council meetings from 12 to five minutes. He cites the success of the five-minute limit at the recent monster meeting concerning casino gambling attended by approximately 700 people, of whom over 100 wished to speak.

Councilwoman Magdalena Szabo seconded the resolution. There are two "courtesy of the floor" slots, the first for comments on agenda items, the second for any topic. A guarantee to speak is available if a person formally signs up before the meeting.

My study of council minutes indicates that 343 people spoke at 110 "courtesies of the floor," or three persons at each. At the present 12-minute limit, that means 36 minutes. At the last council meeting, Karen Dolan gave a well-organized presentation on open space. Dana Grubb also presented a well-researched presentation on solid waste collection and affordable housing. With a five-minute limit, this could not have happened.

Is it wise to discourage concerned citizens from making presentations that contribute to the welfare of the community knowing full well that five minutes is inadequate, based upon the time and effort they spent in preparation? Is not valued citizen input worth 21 minutes of council's time?

Stephen C. Antalics Bethlehem O, my, look what Gadfly found! Browsing through the *Morning Call* archives. (Ok, not quite normal, but how do you spend *your* spare time? Watching television?) Gadfly #1 Stephen Antalics Oct. 22, 2005, bemoaning the reduction of public comment time at Council meetings from 12 mins. to 5 mins.

12 minutes! 12 minutes each!! A paradise for gadflyers!!! Now lost. Forever. Sigh. (I call Stephen Gadfly #1 for his two decades of service, Bill Scheirer is close by at Gadfly #2. I am a Johnny-come-lately, a pretender, a usurper — not worthy of the Gadfly title. But I need a number. Maybe Gadfly double-zero: "Gadflyoo.")

Could there ever have been a time when 12 minutes was allowed??

Gadflyoo understands that there was a time when only 2 or 3 minutes was allowed. A time when throats dried up and tongues shriveled. Thank you, Stephen, for fighting for the public's time at the microphone. As you still do. But this discovery of the Golden Age of Gadflying leads Gadflyoo to make three requests:

1) that when you have something longer to say, you think of the Gadfly blog as your vehicle (cf. the recent invitation to candidates for elected office to "use" us as a platform, but this could apply to any topic you want to explore)

- 2) that you pass the word about the Gadfly blog to the kind of serious, thoughtful type of audience members Gadflyoo aspires to, so that good ideas, provocative ideas can have the widest possible reach and impact (Gadfly has several hundred followers now, but we are a town of 75,000)
- 3) that you help the blog achieve necessary balance by posting oppositional views and/or encouraging others to do so (Gadfly has been criticized for leaning one way)

Gadflyoo encourages you to contribute, promote, criticize.