

# I like unique for Bethlehem

The Bethlehem Gadfly Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues September 30, 2018

My guy Thoreau (a gadfly if there ever was one) describes good writing somewhere as having the feel of a nail driven into the stud instead of the lath and plaster. Dana Grubb is a strong writer. He has already contributed several valuable posts to the Gadfly (for instance, [Banana Factory Expansion #3](#)), and you can see him in effective verbal action on Gadfly grandkid Owen's video of the public meeting on parking ([Parking #11](#)). The Gadfly hopes Dana has a long connection with the Gadfly blog. There was a particular "sock" to Dana's recent [Bethlehem Press editorial "The Same 10 People"](#) (September 27). It must have caused some spilled coffee on Bethlehem breakfast tables last week. It certainly did in my house. I cannot speak to the specific trigger to Dana's editorial, but I would like to speak to his general vision of the public, or certain elements of it, and elected officials.

To me, Gadflies are sacred. Gadflies are the unofficial officials of a town, self-appointed to be the voice of the people. And one of the things I wanted to be sure to do with this blog is memorialize the gadflies. The mayors and prominent Council members will have plenty written about them in permanent, indelible ways in the official annals of our town – and deservedly so. But I wanted to make sure "the other guys" were remembered too – hence the "Gadfly History" feature of the blog. And hence, already, within the first two weeks of "The Bethlehem Gadfly" existence the appreciative notices of Antalics and Scheirer.

Dana too believes gadflies sacred, though he might not use that word. "Our political system requires civic involvement to keep government and elected officials honest, productive and accountable for what they say and do," Dana says, "Residents who attend regularly make well thought out, very well-researched and sometimes critical remarks designed to encourage council members to think deeply about issues and perhaps rethink their positions." Right on. Textbook.

But in the perhaps excessively pious and high-flown clumsiness of my mission statement [on the "About" page](#), I propose a significantly different view of the gadfly figure. The traditional view of the Socrates story is gadfly v. state. Citizens good, rulers bad. We v. you. But this Gadfly thinks differently.

*“That every elected official in a democracy began as a Gadfly. That elected officials are Gadflies still. That elected officials are simply but significantly Gadflies with power.”*

It's not gadflies v. state. But gadflies from every tier united against sterile thinking, stale ideas, lack of imagination, a torpid status quo, apathy, lethargy, a scorn for history, bureaucratic mindlessness, greed, selfishness, corruption. And on and on.

We must believe that our elected officials all probably sought office (not for the money, right, Councilpersons!) because of a burr under their butts, an itch that needed scratching, a need that required filling, a dream that wanted out. They are gadflies.

In Town Hall we are on different sides of the desk. But not in real life. Speaking at Council the other night (when the place was crackling with golf tension and nobody was probably listening — sigh) I spontaneously realized that the meetings are like Church. The agenda is our liturgy, always the same, rigorously and religiously followed. In the front is our altar with High Priest (I am always trying to get President Waldron to smile, is he smiling now?) and his acolytes. We are formal figures: “President Waldron,” “Mayor Donchez,” “Mr. Gallagher.” There can be dramatic moments, but for the most part we are framed in ritual and routine. Mr. Antalics has his assigned part, Mr. Schierer has his assigned part. Which is all as it should be. But it can be numbing. Lots of us, unfortunately, sleep in Church.

The Town Hall is our Church, and Council meetings our service. But I hungered for something different. Not as replacement. But as complement. A place where everybody was together. A place where we could let our hair down a bit. A place where we could trade ideas, try out ideas, talk provisionally and tentatively, talk without being locked in to a position, talk before a vote looms, talk after a vote pleased or angered, talk out-of-the box, talk wildly even. But talk with mutual trust.

Good conversation makes community.

There, that's my revisionist textbook idea of the relationship between gadfly and elected officials that — ha! — Dana's stud-hitting post dragged out of my shadows.

There, that's my dream for the blog.

I think we have a chance to be unique.

It will take a bit of work. And trust.

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And a good start: I have written before how appreciative I am that the mayor and most of Council (but not the solicitors – yet) have signed on. That's quite a risk to take with an old guy they hardly know, and, I hope, offers some optimism to temper Dana's pessimism. I hope there will be good conversation for them to listen to (damn, ending with a preposition again) – that's our challenge – and that they will contribute as well. Healthy dialogue.

I have become what Stephen Crane in *Red Badge of Courage* (are students still reading that classic?) called “a wind demon.”

Signing off.

Gadfly