

# “I truly believe that the city needs some serious help at least with communication and Public Relations”

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, George Floyd killing July 28, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on City Government* 

Mr. Gadfly, thanks for your engagement.

I continue to remind myself that city council positions are voluntary, and I try to remain cognizant that only the mayor is paid for his leadership. Having said that, I am disappointed in the council's and the Mayor's leadership and communication in response to the ongoing BLM/Police Violence protests. (And that which fuels them.)

June 3, I sent the mayor a still unanswered email (copying council) with seven questions in response to his “comments on Minneapolis” in which he neither named George Floyd or blacks, specifically. (To be fair, he referred to the “affected” inclusively, though that is insufficient.) As a result of this failure to communicate, and my fortuitous awareness of the Community “Engagement” Initiative, I have commented by phone at each of the last three council meetings.

Regarding the Initiative, it's about time, especially since we broached the subject about two years ago in a public council meeting after the disturbing death back then of ANOTHER black person at the hands of police. (By the way, not a single public caller during the July 7 council meeting voiced an opinion in favor of the resolution as it stood, while many specifically asked for the vote to be stayed. And only Olga Negron called for postponing voting on it until more thorough public input was had.)

As it has been roughly two years since that meeting, I will not give the Mayor credit for “get[ting] out in front” of the events surrounding

George Floyd's murder (especially as he refused even to identify Mr. Floyd or black people in his comments). We are no farther ahead – as far as the public is aware – than two years ago, at least as far as I can tell. One of the questions I asked the mayor in my June 3 email was “What has been done by the city since then?” (Crickets.)

Now, I support the call of BLM and others for ACTION. It is 2020 and just now our council is calling for discussion. And, are they really? Good faith is required. Suddenly voting on a resolution not presented WITH the minority members of council – or even after THEIR consideration – and without the opportunity for public input is tone deaf at best and a noticeable, inexcusable – if understandable – pattern. Insert Michael Colon's . . . uninspired words here – “I truly believe that Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, we're not going to be the ones to change the world, to change the country.” (My father and his friends would never have let that comment represent Bethlehem without a loud rebuttal, and I certainly won't.)

I truly believe that the city needs some serious help at least with communication and Public Relations. I'd like to see efforts expanded to dialog more effectively WITH the community, not speak AT it like currently takes place through nested digital postings accessible through the city's narrow web portal or announcements via digital news outlets. Perhaps a new hire is called for or the expansion of the job description for an existing position to include communication outreach. (Think of callers' unanswered questions. Don't most hang in the air forever, as if rhetorical, unless the CALLERS follow up?)

How can we improve communication? (Well, certainly work and resources are required.) Imagine various communication inequities and failures being overcome by committing the financial and volunteer resources to REGULAR, socially distanced, FACE-TO-FACE communication at city schools with staff and families AS WELL AS via electronic message boards positioned strategically around the city. (Did you know that the high schools, at least, have invested in a number of

large flat-screen monitors positioned around the school to communicate continually to the school community?)

And imagine all caller questions – and emails – being answered. It's not rocket science that a good marketing campaign includes multiple formats. I'd like our city to be proud enough of its words and deeds to market them adequately. And dialogue requires response.

So let's actually discuss improving the release and availability of information by the City to be sure truly include all. And commit to OPEN public discussion on important community relations matters.

I would like to be part of "momentous." I believe we can change our country . . . and the world. Maybe just a little, maybe a lot. But neither without effort . . . and an attitude adjustment.

Greg Zahm