

Looking forward to Tuesday night's Council meeting

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government October 1, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on City Government* 

Gadfly's looking forward to Tuesday night's City Council meeting hoping to hear more discussion on public safety and the Community Engagement Initiative.

You know that Gadfly's loins lept to hear Councilman Reynolds say "The Community Engagement Initiative is [about] looking at the ways that we as a community can end systemic racism and create an equitable city."

Now there's a vision of the city to resuscitate the idealism of an old Hippie.

Now there's a vision of the city to wake up a complacent public.

Now there's a vision of the city to hang a mayoral campaign on.

Gadfly was so enthused that he envisioned (ever so tongue-in-cheek) [here](#) and [here](#) a new or an additional brand for us: "Bethlehem, the Anti-Racist City."



Bethlehem, not just a non-racist city but an anti-racist city. We know **the difference**, right?

So Gadfly is looking forward to hearing more discussion on public safety and the Community Engagement Initiative with an eye toward advancing the "audaciously ambitious" (Gadfly's eloquence!) goal of ending systemic racism and creating an equitable city.

Because it's not like systemic racism (which you know began a good 600 years ago if you attended the recent BAPL "**Courageous Conversation**") is running out of steam.

The inability of a high-level important person that we all know to unequivocally condemn White Supremacy Tuesday night is a gauge of racism's vitality.

So we must do something.

And our post-GeorgeFloyd record so far to Gadfly's way of thinking and Gadfly's visibility has not been impressive.

Of course, the departure of the police chief surely was an unfortunate occurrence for planning purposes.

New Chief Kott will be confirmed Tuesday night. Thank god for her stepping up. These days the professional life of a police chief is as uncertain as a B-29 pilot in WWII. There will probably be well deserved celebratory speeches. Gadfly wishes her well.

There will be congratulations. There should also be challenges. The one part of a Public Safety meeting devoted to the police department did not seem near enough. Followers know that Gadfly has been putting himself through a self-tutorial on police practices and procedures. Most recently **a forum** organized by a Law Enforcement organization that gave him much to think about, which he shared with you. The installation of Chief Kott marks a new beginning. She may give a speech Tuesday. But Gadfly thinks the new Chief should be invited to a meeting in which she lays out her ideas on a variety of specific matters of current concern. Her syllabus might include training, use of violence, accountability, diversity hiring, internal discipline, bias, transparency, public reporting, community relations, community policing. She's a fresh Ph.D. She should be "locked and loaded" for such a discussion. Now is the time for a thorough examination of the department.

Gadfly has said that the city's post-GeorgeFloyd record has not been impressive.

Let's review.

A selected timeline.

May 25: George Floyd died.

May 31: The Mayor made a statement. It's a good statement, but it does not indicate anything need be done locally in response to the murder.

June 3: The Police Chief made a statement. It's a good statement, but it does not indicate anything should or will be done locally.

June 16: We learn of the Mayor participating with the NAACP in a Community Advisory Board, the details of which have always been sketchy.

June 16: We learn of a proposed meeting on the police use of violence and a proposed Community Engagement Initiative.

July 7: Community Engagement Initiative resolution passes.

August 11: Public Safety Committee open meeting on the police and the CEI.

September 18: We learn of a Committee of the Whole meeting October 29 on "Interaction of the Police Department/Health Bureau/Recreation/Department of Community and Economic Development." No details. Is this related to post-GeorgeFloyd concerns?

October 29: If the Committee of the Whole meeting is on post-GeorgeFloyd concerns, it will be 5 months past the event.

So Gadfly will now make his mentors in Gadfly Academy proud:

There was no initial recognition from the Mayor and Chief that the murder might be an occasion for self-assessment. It took 11 weeks to get to the August 11 Public Safety meeting. The August 11 agenda was too big for one meeting. It does not appear that the meeting was adequately publicized: some callers indicated that that they heard about it late and by chance through social media. Some people who had signed up to speak didn't get to speak because of their placement on a program that went — predictably — late. Approximately 27 members of the public did

speak, vigorously and about evenly split — indicating considerable public interest, but the meeting ended with no indication of what the next step by the city would be. There seemed to be no forethought of what the next step in a process of discussion perhaps leading to city action would be. In the August 18, September 1, and September 15 Council meetings (Gadfly would be glad to be corrected on this), the only references to the August 11 discussion were a brief reference to a meeting with Lehigh prof Ochs on her research on local policing sometime in the fall and a remark by one Councilperson, purpose of which seemed to be to start a dispute and which was thankfully cut off by the Council president. Gadfly would have thought that good management procedure would have been to tell the eager public on August 11 what the next step would be, to take time under new business August 18 for Council members, as a matter of respect to the 27 callers and the large number of others attending on livestream, to reflect on what they heard, well, to indicate that they had heard. Without that respectful response, why would anybody engage again? Now we have a meeting October 29 which, as far as Gadfly knows, and he tries to keep his antennae up, may or may not have anything to do with post-GeorgeFloyd matters.

So there's bitchy Gadfly's case for feeling that our record so far in responding to the national reckoning on race is not impressive.

And he looks forward to hearing more Tuesday.

As usual, Gadfly invites your response, even if it's a slap upside the head.

*“We are at an important moment in our community’s history,
and we have an opportunity to do something truly momentous.”*

Anna Smith