

The Zoning Board controversy: part 7

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Serious Issues August 26, 2019

(The latest in a series of posts on City government)



We are now in the upper levels of the widening gyre that for Gadfly represents the structure of Councilman Callahan's new business "debate" at the August 20 City Council meeting, which started, as we examined a few posts ago, with his concern over Councilwoman Van Wirt's phone conversation with Zoning Board Nominee-1.

At this highest level of the gyre, BC connects, although unsuccessfully, the rejected appointment of Nominee-1 to the Zoning Board with two big overriding and tricky subjects: campaign finance and recusal.

Both topics, however, that seem to need some legislative guidelines.

It was Councilman Colon who said he looked forward to reopening this conversation with the aim of forming rules and standards for everybody to follow. Amen to that!

So it is good that BC brought these two topics to the forefront.

Let's take campaign finance first.

BC has caught wind of the fact that PVW may be proposing "a campaign contribution amendment to ban people from raising a certain kind of money." Since PVW self-funded her recent campaign to the tune of

\$9000, something that no other member of Council could do, what will happen, he asks, when people who can't self-fund are limited in the amount or kind of money they can raise? The answer is that "only rich people can run for office," and that will be a "sad" day. Now Gadfly agrees. He wouldn't want to see the good Nominee-1's of the City shut out from seeking office or facing insurmountable odds to success. And he wouldn't want to see our local government only by the rich. But there is no PVW amendment on the table now to look at, nobody knows exactly what PVW may be proposing in this regard (if anything), so BC's point about PVW's views on campaign finance has only distant relevance to the issue at hand and is out of place. But as a result of BC's heads-up, Gadfly looks forward to a "rich" conversation on this important subject that is worthy of substantial thought.

And then, second, there's the tricky matter of recusal.

BC finds "bizarre" the "hypocrisy" of JWR taking, over the years, \$40-50-60,000 in economic development and Union money and yet penalizing Nominee-1 who took only a minuscule fraction of that. What's fair about that, he asks?

BC is also quite aware that nobody questioned PVW on her participation in the 2 W. Market case (see under Topics on the Gadfly sidebar). PVW lives on W. Market several houses from the contested one, and it was well known that her sympathies lay with the neighbors trying to oust the business under fire. Yes, Gadfly remembers thinking it curious that PVW got a pass in this deliberation.

So the personal decision of when to recuse and when not looks like it's also in need of some "rich" conversation aimed at guidelines known to and followed by all.

But these examples do not apply well for BC in the instant situation. Here individuals were left to decide for themselves whether to recuse or not — and BC is not happy with their decisions. Why would it be any different with leaving Nominee-1 to decide for herself? So — as important as a wider recusal conversation is needed — it does not advance BC's argument here and is out of place.