

Council Candidates – 4-year seat – Question 2 (19)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Candidates for election, Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues April 6, 2019

Take the “Connecting Bethlehem” survey and encourage someone else also

(19th in a series of posts on candidates for election)

Election Day is May 21.

Once again a tip o’ the hat and a wave of the wings to the candidates for helping us be more informed voters.

Reverse alphabetical order this time.

Vote for three.

What goals, proposals, ideas, issues, problems, or concerns motivate you to serve or continue to serve on City Council?



Paige Van Wirt (incumbent)

Transparency: I am reintroducing the Ethics Ordinance this spring — citizens must be able to trust their own government.

The proposed Ethics Ordinance will bring sunlight to campaign finance, including measures that mandate recusal of

a councilperson from voting on a measure when they have accepted significant political donations from the beneficiary of the measure, usually a developer. The ordinance addresses contracting relationships, nepotism and financial disclosures as well. Everything that is done on council and by Bethlehem’s public officials should be easily accessible and understandable by the average citizen. I am committed to opening up the decision-making of our municipal government to the view of the citizens, including the workings of our commissions and authorities, especially authorities that use taxpayer-leveraged funds for their activities.

Accountability: I will continue to exert exacting financial oversight to our budget and ordinance measures, asking tough questions and requiring sufficient data before voting on any measure. Citizens should plainly and clearly understand the reasoning behind a council member’s vote on

each issue. I understand the impact of taxes on our citizens, and how devastating each incremental increase can be. I understand how a parking-meter rate increase can impact our downtown businesses, and I performed my own survey to ensure I really knew how our small businesses would be affected. As a representative body, City Council should be held in account for all Bethlehem's citizens, including people struggling with opioid addiction, people who are homeless, as well as people unable to find affordable housing. How do our current zoning measures inhibit the production of affordable housing? We should be looking closely at the ways our current laws impact smart development in our city. Accountability also extends to our environment. Bethlehem City Council should lead the way with measures to increase green efficiencies in new buildings, decrease our solid waste stream and work on measuring and addressing our air quality.

Walkability: Bethlehem can become even more of an invigorating, economically-charged city by reinforcing our gifts — among them history, charm, and geography, with a plan that looks to increasing the walkability of our wonderful city, as mundane as fixing our sidewalks, or as transformative as a pedestrian bridge project. Walkability powers property values. Walkability attracts new talent and capital, by creating more, and better, jobs. Walkability creates community, and to do this we must invest in attainable housing in our downtowns, to create density. We can mandate smart inclusionary zoning, to help address the lack of affordable housing. Arts are the anchor and catalyst to a healthy city. We should help our local arts community be more visible, with more public art and performances. There is an economic renaissance headed to Bethlehem and we must start planning now, to help shape a Bethlehem that provides a joyful, dynamic quality of life for all our citizens.



David Saltzer

My first and foremost goal as a Bethlehem City Council member would be to make Bethlehem a safe city for our residents, visitors, and employees. As a retired City of Bethlehem Firefighter who had to retire early due to an on-the-job injury, I feel that we need to do everything in our power to make sure that everyone is safe and goes home at the end of the day. This is the true motto of public safety workers — Everyone goes home.

I also believe in responsible development within the city and attracting businesses that will provide good jobs and decent living wages and benefits to its employees, therefore allowing the city to grow and the people to reinvest in the city.

We also need a city government that is united and working toward the same goals related to safety, economic growth and stability, and a high quality of life. My experience as a firefighter, 911 dispatcher, and former union president of the Bethlehem Firefighters IAFF Local 735 affords me a distinctive and unique approach to city council. My first-hand accounts will help bridge the gap between council, administration, and city employees by using my years of experience interacting with all aspects of city government, negotiating contracts and language, speaking on issues with council, and sitting on various committees.

My career fighting fires ended earlier than I desired, so now I strive to stay involved in different ways to serve the city's employees, residents, and visitors. Being a City Council member enables me to continue to serve the city I love in ways in which I feel passionate. This opportunity is another way I can make a difference.



Carol Ritter

I thought about running for a long time and have admired the progress I've seen in the city for so long.

I'm interested in smart common-sense economic development in Bethlehem. It is an essential element to the success of our city and its ability to bring new jobs into the community for our citizens, along with creating new tax revenue streams so the burden does not have to fall solely on our homeowners many of whom are seniors on a fixed income and working-class families.

Open and transparent decision making — I intend to be an active listener and have no pre-determined agenda. Gathering all the facts, collaborating with experts, working with council, and listening to the public will enable me to make educated, informed, and transparent decisions.

Small business growth — the strength of Bethlehem's downtowns are its small businesses. I have tremendous passion for small businesses and have made my career helping them to grow and prosper.

Quality of Life — In order to keep our neighborhoods strong, I will not lose sight of the importance of delivering effective and efficient services to all citizens. I have been a strong advocate of Bethlehem's Mounted Police for years and believe they are just one program that assists in keeping our city safe.

I support environmental protections and initiatives that would add to our quality of life. Clean water and a clean environment add so much to a city . . . jobs, health and wellness, making our city attractive to visitors and those looking to relocate, and added recreational opportunities.



J. William Reynolds (incumbent)

Bethlehem's Climate Action Plan – Since being elected to City Council, I have worked to support the City of Bethlehem's commitment to maintaining and protecting our environment.

In 2017, I was proud to propose Bethlehem's first climate action plan. Utilizing the expertise of citizens, local environment groups, our Environmental Advisory Council, and city employees, we are building a climate action plan that includes citywide energy reduction goals, internal governmental reduction goals, legislative policy recommendations, and mitigation strategies for vulnerable areas of our city. Our climate action plan also is creating a permanent structure of citizens and local environmental groups that will remain engaged and able to advocate for environmental responsibility going forward.

NorthSide 2027 – Our neighborhoods are our most valuable asset as a community. When I proposed Northside 2027 a few years ago, the goal was to invest in our north side neighborhoods that surround William Penn and Thomas Jefferson Elementary schools. Working with the Bethlehem Area School District, Moravian College, residents, and small businesses, significant work has been completed in 2018 and 2019 to design and implement improvements in these neighborhoods by focusing on the issues facing our families and residents related to housing, recreation opportunities, transportation, and commercial corridors. I am looking forward to the release of the plan shortly and getting to work on the priorities of the neighborhoods as determined by the residents.

Technology – Bethlehem’s current technology initiatives have the ability to transform the way things are done in our city. I am proud to be working with the Administration on our open data portal, improving our social media and communication channels, digital equity, and developing a Bethlehem app. Our technology initiatives are a vital component in creating opportunities for everyone in our community as well as keep Bethlehem at the forefront of innovation in the region.



Michael Colon (incumbent)

These last 3+ years have been a great privilege, which is why I ask for another term to continue my service to Bethlehem. Bethlehem is in the midst of a major transition as we move our city 911 operations up to Northampton County to take over service. A 911 center is something we don’t usually think about until we are faced with an emergency requiring us to call for help. The 911 center also handles all non-emergency calls and dispatches for our first responders. Given my work history as a former Northampton County 911 dispatcher and knowledge of 911 operations, I will continue to help provide oversight through the merger and beyond to ensure adequate service.

I’d also continue to focus energy towards the ongoing opioid problem, which we are in the midst of. Four years ago a Bethlehem patrolman told me heroin was the biggest problem he faced every day at work as a police officer. Not five minutes after our conversation, he was dispatched to an overdose. The numbers nationally, regionally, and locally are alarming. In the past few years Bethlehem has instituted the BPAIR program to provide an easier path towards treatment while first responders are carrying naloxone to battle the wave of overdose calls. I will continue to advocate for all efforts to quell the spread of this poison throughout our community.

Lastly, I want City Hall to continue to have the resources necessary to meet the needs of our community. Staffing at City Hall is at the lowest anyone can remember. As the cost of doing business continues to rise each department is facing tighter budgets. The City must continue to find responsible ways to develop and grow our tax base to maintain the level of service Bethlehem expects from its local government.