

# Gadfly Forum highlight: Council candidate Leon on Bethlehem: a tale of two cities?

The Bethlehem Gadfly Candidates for election, Election, Forum May 11, 2021

🦋 Latest in a series of posts on the Gadfly Forum 🦋

*“I was born and raised in South Bethlehem. . . . I felt this divide growing up. . . . What I hear most often is that we need a strong voice for the Southside. . . . The implication, to me, is that [the residents] do not feel heard.”*

*Rachel Leon*

Another week, another Gadfly prompt from hell for our candidates!

I joked in the prompt audio that they’re wishing I’d ask about something easy, like fixing potholes.

But Gadfly is up in the stratosphere. Literally. Gadfly asked everybody to look at Bethlehem from a high up perspective.

Inspired by Mark Iampietro’s “Lookout yoga,” Gadfly asked the candidates to take the proverbial 30,000ft. view of our town.



And what did they see? one city, one city with two complementary parts, one city with two different parts, one city with two contrary parts, one city with equal parts, two (or more) cities ?

If you want to listen to my full prompt. click [here](#). For responses by other Council candidates to this prompt, click [here](#).

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**Rachel Leon**

Thank you, Gadfly, for another thought-provoking prompt.

Are we a city of two cities?

I was born and raised in South Bethlehem, so I can only speak from my experience.



Cities all over our country are broken into downtown areas, arts districts, and historic districts. What makes this so pronounced in Bethlehem is the presence of our river. A 10-minute walk across the Fahy can feel like leaving one city and entering another, but we are all Bethlehem.

The labeling of Bethlehem as a city of two cities can feel a bit antiquated, especially when viewing the divide within the historic context of the joining of the three boroughs. However, I felt this divide growing up in South Bethlehem. Whatever reason led to Bethlehem feeling like a city divided, those sentiments have lingered. I hear this sentiment echoed as I continue speaking to people about how I can help if I am elected. What I hear most often is that we need a strong voice for the Southside. The implication, to me, is that they do not feel heard. I know for a fact that South Bethlehem has had amazing community leadership speaking loudly in defense of our communities. Maybe the issue isn't the speaking but the ability to hear their voices. If they aren't being heard, maybe they are being spoken over.

Bethlehem is a beautiful city with a unique history. A history that is important to preserve, even while we move toward increased development. I am passionate in my belief that development needs to be intentional and considerate of the communities we are asking to bear the brunt of continued development. South Bethlehem is often spoken about in terms of student housing and lower income families. Affluence and struggle. This just isn't true. Communities are not monoliths; they are made up of people of diverse backgrounds, be that ethnic or financial. If we miss this important fact, we miss what makes South Bethlehem so special.

So, as a resident of South Bethlehem, I can best answer the question of if we are divided by continuing to raise the voices of people in South

Bethlehem who believe we are. They aren't digging back 100 years to validate their ideas. They are pointing to decisions that have been made in recent years. Decisions that they have shown up to stand against. Decisions that they have fought against. Decisions, that in the end, they were unable to stop from being made. I hope that, as Bethlehem continues to move forward, we listen to all our communities and how they want to see their city grow and develop. I hope that elected officials ensure that the southside doesn't become the default location for unwanted land uses or over-development. I hope that we value all areas of our city for their own unique history even as we continue to work together toward a stronger, more united Bethlehem.