

# Councilman Callahan: The Department of Community and Economic Development is “over-bloated”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Budget December 17, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on the City Budget* 

**View the Mayor’s 2021 Proposed Budget**

**City Council December 15 video**

For the purposes of voting at the December 15 City Council meeting, the budget was broken up into these 12 parts, corresponding to parts of the actual budget that you can see if you follow the link above.

Council took 12 votes.

All parts passed by a 7-0 vote except parts 8A, 8K, and 8L.

Parts 8A, 8K, and 8L passed 6-1, Councilman Callahan being the nay vote each time.

8. Ordinances for Final Passage.

- 8 A. Bill No. 27 – 2020 – Adopting the 2021 General Fund Budget
- 8 B. Bill No. 28 – 2020 – Adopting the 2021 Water Fund Budget
- 8 C. Bill No. 29 – 2020 – Adopting the 2021 Sewer Fund Budget
- 8 D. Bill No. 30 – 2020 – Adopting the 2021 Golf Course Enterprise Fund Budget
- 8 E. Bill No. 31 – 2020 – Adopting the 2021 Liquid Fuels Fund Budget
- 8 F. Bill No. 32 – 2020 – Adopting the 2021 Capital Budget for Non-Utilities
- 8 G. Bill No. 33 – 2020 – Adopting the 2021 Capital Budget for Water Utilities
- 8 H. Bill No. 34 – 2020 – Adopting the 2021 Capital Budget for Sewer Utilities
- 8 I. Bill No. 35 – 2020 – Adopting the 2021 CDBG Budget
- 8 J. Bill No. 36 – 2020 – Adopting the 2021 Storm Water Fund Budget
- 8 K. Bill No. 37 – 2020 – Fixing the 2021 Tax Rate for All City Purposes
- 8 L. Bill No. 39 – 2020 – Stormwater Collection and Management User Fee Ordinance

## **8A: General Fund Budget**

This is the section of the budget containing the police and fire departments.

Councilman Reynolds had previously asked Chief Kott to report at this meeting with a community engagement plan for the department. The Chief read her response and discussion ensued with Councilfolk Reynolds, Negron, and Crampsie Smith. Councilwoman Crampsie Smith raised the troubling possibility of low morale in the Fire department. Gadfly will devote a separate post solely to this discussion.

Councilman Callahan indicated, without elaboration, that he would vote “no” on this section of the budget because of the cuts to the fire department and Lehigh University’s withdrawal of an annual \$100,000 that had been going to fund city housing inspectors.

## **8K: Tax Rate**

Councilman Callahan voted “no” here without elaboration.

## **8L: Stormwater**

Gadfly had not been paying a lot of attention to this issue and thus has not reported on it to you previously. Here's what he understands. The City has been mandated by the state to set a "Stormwater Collection and Management User Fee." The City set the fee at \$60 per homeowner. Council members — especially Crampsie Smith, Negron, and Van Wirt — have sought a way to alleviate that burden on low income residents and have questioned whether fees for the Housing Authority and School District would additionally be passed on to low income residents. There was thoughtful discussion. One option, for instance, might be a tiered system in which higher income people would pay more than \$60 and low income residents would pay less or nothing at all. The City is considering options and further thoughtful discussion on the fee will take place early next year. See meeting [video](#) mins. 1:50:00-2:05:00.

The discussion of the stormwater piece of the budget ended in a way that highlighted tension over Councilman Callahan's desire to cut the budget. Sounding much the fiscal conservative in contrast to liberal spenders, Councilman Callahan pointed out that we can't just keep adding taxes and fees, that somewhere along the line we need to cut. He used the feasibility study for the pedestrian bridge again as an example of something that he was in favor of but that was improper funding at this particular time. He predicted that next year at this time Council would again be faced with raising taxes. The Councilman reminded everybody that he tried to cut inspectors from the DCED budget — DCED being the only department that has grown significantly in the past six years and a department that is "over-bloated." Councilman Callahan's discussion engaged Councilman Reynolds and President Waldron and was marked with a reference to Councilwoman Van Wirt.

This part of the meeting outlines importantly different perspectives on the budget and is worth listening to (7 mins.):

