

BPA fines proposal on hold (68)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Gadfly's posts, Parking, Serious Issues November 9, 2018

(68th in a series of posts on parking)

Ok, is this the way you saw it?

Here's the bottom line: City Council last night voted 6-1 to table indefinitely the Bethlehem Parking Authority's proposal to increase fines, an action that BPA even suggested. The motion can be taken off the table at any time, and the legislative process will start over. The meter rate increase will still go into effect January 1 as planned. Mayor Donchez made his longest statement yet (which we hope to publish here) about the history of Polk garage planning and promised more info early next year. All agreed something will eventually have to be done about the fines. In a related development, Council voted 4-3 to deny re-appointment of the bulldog bodyguard BPA solicitor who famously told Gadfly that "Nobody gets to interrogate the Board" during a meeting, then also attempted to thwart his questions after a meeting as well.

The discussion of the fine proposal was long and very interesting. Gadfly will return shortly with a more extensive description and some analysis – and video.

For now, Sara's article will fill you in nicely.

[Sara K. Satullo](http://lehighvalleylive.com), "Why Bethlehem is holding off on hiking parking fines." lehighvalleylive.com, November 8, 2018.

Bethlehem City Council is holding off on a request to hike city parking violation fines until it can get more information from the city's parking authority. A majority of council was reticent to back the ordinances that would hike the fines on first reading Wednesday evening and voted 6-1 to postpone them indefinitely.

Donchez said the authority wanted more time and planned to come back to council in early 2019 to discuss the fines and the financing options for a new parking garage planned for the corner of East Third and Polk streets. The authority is now exploring whether it will finance Polk Street independently or with bonds backed by a city guarantee, Donchez said.

"There's not a lot of confidence currently in what is the long-term plan for the parking authority," Council President Adam Waldron said. "It kind of feels like they are making it up as they go." Waldron noted that's likely more reflective of poor communication, rather than poor planning. Waldron emphasized that parking authority Executive Director Kevin Livingston himself requested the matter be tabled, which was echoed by Donchez.

Councilman Bryan Callahan, who is the liaison to the parking authority, adamantly opposed postponing votes on the measures indefinitely. He argued at length about how crucial it was to hike the fines and the meter rates at the same time. Otherwise, long-term parkers are likely to roll the dice, not pay the meters and risk getting a \$10 fine, he said. This will hurt businesses that need meters to turn over, Callahan said. "All we are voting on is a ticket fine, not the Polk Street garage," he said. "They (the authority) are willing to wait until we get our act together. They're into parking. They're not into politics. They get a mandate from the mayor. The parking authority director works at the will of the mayor." He criticized other council members for using the fines as "leverage" over the authority and making them political.

The mayor does plan to still make the parking meter rate hike effective Jan. 1. Councilwoman Paige Van Wirt suggested the Jan. 1 date is arbitrary and the city could opt to hold off on raising meter rates until council is ready to pass the fine increase. Donchez did not respond to the suggestion during the meeting.

Councilman J. William Reynolds said council is hoping to bring more transparency to the discussions and more public understanding about the relationship between a city and its authority. He pressed Donchez to lay out a vision and be clear on the impetus for some "large scale decisions." "The administration's job is to stand up and say, 'This is what we think is best,'" Reynolds said.

The mayor reiterated how crucial the Polk Street parking deck is to the ongoing redevelopment of East Third Street in South Bethlehem and to the success of Northampton Community College, The Factory, St. Luke's Health Network and Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts. NCC and Charter Arts have committed to 265 spaces in the garage.

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There's a lot to chew on in this latest parking chapter. Been a busy week. The Planning Commission meeting today on 2 W. Market was riveting as well. So Gadfly has a lot to catch you up on.