

Councilman Callahan's angst (67)

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Martin Tower, Serious Issues June 1, 2019

(67th in a series on Martin Tower)

There were aspects of the Martin Tower demolition that were contentious.

Gadfly's pee was warm over lack of direct attention by the City to long-term health effects from the "dust."

A follower said Gadfly sounded "agitated" and "furious" at the Nitschmann night meeting. ([You can play the tape.](#))

But one thing Gadfly readily acknowledged at that meeting as did everyone else before, during, and since the demolition was the absolutely outstanding work done by Robert Novatnack, Bethlehem's Emergency Services Coordinator, who led the project from the City side. Mr. Novatnack was given an award by the County and at the May 22 City Council meeting received a particularly eloquent citation from the City (kudos to the author!). You can listen to that well-deserved citation on the [City video beginning at min. 59:30](#). It is really excellent.

Everybody please take a moment and nod thanks in the direction of City Hall to Mr. Novatnack for a job selflessly and tirelessly well done. There is something in his very gentle and genial voice that gives you confidence that all is under control.

But Gadfly would like to call attention here to the interchange between Councilwoman Van Wirt and Councilman Callahan that framed Mr.

Novatnack's presentation and, rather awkwardly in Gadfly's mind, temporarily halted the presentation of the citation.

Please listen to Gadfly's audio of this section of the Council meeting or [watch on the City video beginning at minute 43:47](#). It takes less than 10 minutes.

AUDIO RECORDINGS UNAVAILABLE IN THIS ARCHIVE

Gadfly has said before that the dynamic between these two councilpersons is worth paying attention to.

PVW made three points:

1) the air sampling results should be posted online for citizens to look at

2) she was quite sure (personal inspection) that there was cement debris swept down into the Monocacy and we must do better in the future protecting our natural resource

3) speaking as a physician and explicitly answering an argument made by the demolitioners about the safety of the "dust," she observed that "imploded cement particulate from cured concrete . . . is incredibly different from what is spewed out from our cement plants [like Casilio]."

PVW's tone – to Gadfly's ear, and you can judge for yourself – was firm but fair.

She certainly was not accusatory toward Mr. Novatnack:

"I do think that you handled a difficult situation . . . with grace and patience, and I thank you for the good job you did with that."

“Mr. Novatnack has been very responsive all the time to all of my concerns.”

“This is not on you, Mr. Novatnack . . . this is not you doing it better, but I think we as a community . . .”

“I really do admire how you’ve handled all this, handled all my concerns . . . Thank you for your patience with me particularly and helping the citizens understand what was happening.”

“You are very responsive, attentive, and patient.”

“Thank you again for your good work.”

Councilman Callahan, admitting to an “angst in [his] tone right now,” then temporarily halted the reading of the citation for the purpose of 1) questioning PVW’s “awareness” (a term used three times) of certain facts since she is only a recent resident of the City and 2) decrying her lack of questioning before “stoking fear” (a phrase used three times) among the residents – a behavior irresponsible by public officials.

A point of order halted BC’s train of thought.

Gadfly felt BC was out of order. Gadfly was very troubled by BC’s response to PVW. He found it both condescending and erroneous.

To Gadfly, PVW’s comments made perfectly clear that she knew about Casilio and that she was probably making a pest of herself asking questions.

To Gadfly, “stoking fear” might be thought of as insulting. PVW is a physician, and she made a comment about the particulates and public health danger in her professional capacity.

BC’s point of PVW’s short 4-year residence in the City as implying lack of standing in the Martin Tower discussion reminded Gadfly of BC last year claiming higher authority to speak about the Southside since he has lived in Bethlehem longer than Councilwoman Negron.

PVW sounded like a responsible public official to Gadfly.

One of the goals of the Gadfly project is to help us know our Councilpersons better, especially when it comes time to vote. Council meetings are now on video, so residents can judge for themselves.

But Gadfly thought he would italicize this interchange, as it were, as another one especially illustrative of the nature and temperament of these two Councilpeople ([see post #60](#)), who literally sit at opposite poles of the Head Table.