

Key moments in the reappointment discussion (1)

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government February 10, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on City Government* 

What were you thinking as you listened to the audio in the last post from the February 4 discussion on ABC reappointments at the Council meeting?

Gadfly thought this short 5-minute diametrically opposed interchange between Councilmembers Van Wirt and Callahan certainly a key moment.

Councilwoman Van Wirt argues for Council oversight of appointments and for citizen advocates as members, Councilman Callahan for acquiescing to the Mayor's appointments except in exceptional circumstances.

Where do you stand? With whom do you side? How do you see it?

https://youtu.be/VpqI_47237U

- Councilwoman Van Wirt says the ABCs are a “huge source of power,” often a “cloaked power,” and asks for more citizen advocate types, perhaps people who represent a different geographic area or have a different point of view. She talks of Council's obligation to represent the citizens, which may mean putting “new blood” on the ABCs — making clear (as everybody will do) that criticisms have nothing personal to do with the individuals nominated, who are to be thanked for their service.
- Councilman Callahan says elections have consequences, the Mayor has prerogatives regarding appointments, Council should defer to the Mayor as a courtesy, and it's hard to remember, except for this year, Council turning down mayoral nominees. He alludes to reasons that are more personal, perhaps political in questioning appointments.
- Councilwoman Van Wirt answers that the Council's role is oversight, to counterbalance the Mayor, and calls for representatives with different views and views not traditionally represented. “Just because

we have been doing this for perpetuity does not mean it is the right way and should continue.”

- Councilman Callahan calls again for respecting the Mayor’s decision and choice especially since there is no issue with this respected and experienced nominee.

Gadfly would point out two things:

1) There is a difference between appointment and reappointment. He can see going along with a mayoral “appointment” (a la Mr. Callahan) in the vast majority of the cases but would opt for strict oversight in “reappointment.”

2) He would hope the Mayor would agree with the kind of representation that Councilwoman Van Wirt advocates so that there would be no tension between them on the issue of the kind of person best serving the City on the hot-button ABCs.

Would you want to weigh in?

to be continued . . .