

Report on the Oct 10 Meeting on the BPA Proposal to Raise Parking Fines (36)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Gadfly's posts, Parking, Serious Issues October 11, 2018

(36th in a series of posts on parking)

Prologue: Meter rates and fines. Gadfly has used the analogy of conjoined twins with separate doctors with separate treatment plans. The doctors have to work together for the twins to survive, but Gadfly believes he heard last night that there was no coordination between the Mayor and Council. Who is responsible for facilitating coordination – BPA? Should BPA have called a meeting bringing the two sides together to talk preliminarily about their positions and attempt to reach consensus? I think I read somewhere that Council has a liaison to BPA. If true, was there a channel of communication here that wasn't utilized? Seems to Gadfly that the process was almost destined to blow up even if good will on both sides.

Gadfly loves drama. And last night's meeting was damn interesting. But he has to feel that the whole process needed better management.

Why do we have such a "conjoined twins" system? President Waldron referred to "checks and balances" last night. If so, what are the competing interests that necessitate checks and balances? Well, checks and balances might be the reason. But we just don't know for sure.

Gadfly is always buzzing about the value of history in helping us understand where we are. So Gadfly is going to try to dig into the origins of this system. Maybe there was a reason at a particular time that made this system reasonable. And maybe that reason is no longer operative.

Who knows. Gadfly will gad-in to the past history of the BPA (where's a good political science student looking for a Master's Thesis topic when you need one?). But gonna take some time. And the issue comes up again on Tuesday. Sigh. But maybe ultimately the process that Council and the Mayor wrought in the past can be changed going forward.

Gadfly mentioned that he's pressed for time today (two more meetings ahead!), but here's some quick bullet notes. He'll come back to try to focus narrower (more narrowly? what the hell, Gadfly!) later.

From the audience:

- complaint about the piecemeal approach
- raise rates of violators rather than users
- there's no plan where the money's going
- the whole approach was not "sophisticated"
- gretzyness over favorable leases to Lehigh and St. Luke's
- garages don't pay for themselves
- soundbites: dead-end policies, white elephant, money pit, death spiral, doubling down on foolishness
- old-fashioned, antiquated view of parking management
- a revenue ploy
- some garage leases way undervalued
- where's the Mayor?

From the front desk –nay side:

- rates first, then fines = lousy order
- rather increase fines than fees
- definitely not the double whammy of raising both
- low leases make no sense
- would favor higher fines but not raising both
- the whole process disjointed
- What about Polk St Garage?
- What about Walnut St Garage?
- need entire picture
- build first and then catch up not good
- depressed prices for institutional users

From the front desk: the non-voters

- lots of good ideas here, no bad ones
- complicated interconnections
- no unified view in business community
- restaurant vs. retail interests different

- not a unified interest group
- appreciation for outside-the-box thinking
- different moving parts
- would be good to look at variable rate parking
- good sound bite, need “efficient nimble system”
- Lehigh does other good things: ambassadors, inspector
- not one magic bullet
- need to balance
- must be honest about how complicated it is
- variable rate may be part of the solution
- hands tied by the Mayor
- no coordination
- why aren’t we talking about variable parking

Interesting discussion: what will BPA do if this proposal voted down?

- took people in the audience a bit by surprise: BPA/Desman said that the purpose of the proposal was not to raise revenue but greater compliance with regulations
- if fine increase denied: increased enforcement, increased towing, more staff
- BPA makes most money by people parking legally
- no significant revenue increase from fines projected, but yes for rates

Talk about surprises:

Councilperson Van Wirt made up and delivered a “generic survey” to 70 small businesses. Many did not know about the increase. 30 surveys received back. Many responses completely against the price increases. “We are not reaching out to people affected.”

[We learned in other conversation that the Board of the Downtown Business Association “acknowledged” the BPA proposals but did not take a position.]

Ok, best Gadfly can do for now.