

“We encourage Council not to proceed recklessly”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Lehigh Valley Good Neighbors Alliance, Police July 23, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police* 

Quality public policy starts with quality public conversation.

Glen Ragni

I haven't heard a lot of nuanced conversation.

Carrie Fitzgibbons

Gadfly knows nine uses of the comma, but he also knows that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

The strongest and starkest negative and cautionary comments about the Reynolds/Crampsie Smith resolution at the July 7 City Council meeting came from the **members of activist groups** who came in person to the meeting. You might want to go back and refresh yourselves on that commentary.

So, at the July 21 City Council meeting we had the pushback.

Good conversation builds community.

The callers oppose defunding of the police and see the humanity and value of the police, but what Gadfly hears, over all, is a call for good, wide-ranging, multi-perspective'd conversation.

Please listen to the voices of your fellow residents here. Don't just skim and scan Gadfly's notes. Always go to the primary sources

Glen Ragni

- I'm calling today out of concern about the quality and diversity of the recent public statements made about defunding, disbanding, and abolishing the Bethlehem Police Department.
- During the Bethlehem City Council's last meeting all of the speakers repeated almost exactly the same demands and were affiliated with the same few political organizations.
- They do not represent our entire community.
- Many of the speakers insisted that the time for conversation was over, that they've already had the relevant conversations amongst themselves, that they have their own initiative and they don't want any more input from any members of our community, or even the involvement of the democratically elected Mayor or the police . . . we just want your money.
- Another speaker . . . we don't need to hear from any more whites.
- Appallingly, several members of Council seemed extremely tolerant of these demands and even agreed with most of what was said, that centered around the abolition of the entire police department.
- Over the past several months we have initiated conversations with hundreds of residents and stakeholders in our community. . . . The majority of those we have spoken with have expressed strong reservations about defunding . . . the police.
- . . . abolishing the police department represents reckless public policy . . . experimented with this path . . . and the results have been deadly.
- We encourage Council not to proceed recklessly . . . we encourage everyone in our community not to proceed recklessly.
- Our community is diverse in our makeup, but we are one community.
- We must learn to either live together respectfully as brothers and sisters, or we will surely perish together as fools.
- Quality public policy starts with quality public conversation.

- It's troubling to hear that some community members say they have no interest in the exchange of ideas.
- How are we going to proceed when the police have reached out in solidarity, the Mayor has reached out in solidarity, the Council has reached out?
- Where does that leave the other 75,000 members of the Bethlehem community whose concerns haven't even been heard yet?
- How do we proceed when only one side wants to have a conversation. and the other side is only issuing demands?
- That attitude doesn't come from a sense of respect for the community.
- . . . that all community members listen to their own hearts and characters . . . the quest for peace and mutual understanding.
- That quest for mutual understanding begins by genuinely listening and truly hearing each other's troubles and concerns, so that we can better search for balanced solutions and choose policies that respect our common humanity.

Carrie Fitzgibbons

- I'm still trying to gather and process information from many points of view, and I imagine you are as well. Clearly this is a complex issue that requires such nuanced thinking and much research.
- And my concern is that I haven't heard a lot of nuanced conversation around this topic. Instead, what I've heard doesn't qualify as conversation at all if conversation is a free exchange of ideas from multiple perspectives building toward some workable solutions that can be tried and tracked to see how really effective they are.
- In public debate thus far we've only heard how one group of people view policing, and their perspectives deserve to be heard.

- Some very broad, absolute statements have been made, and we would humbly ask Council to actively reach out to everyone in the community to seek out as many perspectives as possible. There will be many different constituencies that will be affected differently by any changes that are made.
- And we would also ask before public policy is set that rigorous research is conducted backed by statistical evidence.
- Some people say the police shouldn't have a voice in this process. I disagree. . . . their unique perspective of what could possibly improve our system.
- This report [the recently published 2019 police report] If we have to go through all those [65,000] calls . . . to better understand what the police do for us, so be it.
- So far we haven't discussed any real statistics . . . unbiased understanding of the value our police department contributes to our daily lives.
- I also feel it is important to realize that our police officers are human. Police have been referred to of late in any number of insulting and threatening ways. At the last Council meeting they were called an "evil machine" and when we start referring to groups with demeaning names, you make it easier to treat them as less than human, and you invite in hatred and violence.
- Police risk their lives every day balancing [our] rights . . . and they are legitimate members of our community.
- I find it sadly ironic that groups who are combating their own marginalization would attempt to marginalize other groups who are a legitimate part of our community.
- If people truly want a conversation, they must welcome the contributions others make. Otherwise, this movement begins to feel it's less about justice and more about revenge.
- Some are not interested in balancing their rights with the rights of others.
- We are all human, and we all have flaws, and everyone needs to be held accountable for their actions.

- In any relationship, both parties bring 50% to the interaction. . . .Perhaps part of that education should be to teach citizens how to respectfully respond to the legitimate requests of police officers.
- We only achieve compassion for each other by understanding the other side's perspective.
- We can separate the truth from the errors that are part of everybody's belief system.
- If there is genuine dialog . . . we can truly hear others, and to truly hear others is to value what other persons say. Not just talk at each other but really listen.

Bruce Haines

- I was compelled to call in because of [residents Ragni and Fitzgibbons above]. I thought both of them eloquently spoke to the need for real dialog and not one-way demands.
- I have no demands tonight. I simply want to compliment them on the quality of thought that went into their presentations, and I support what they had to say completely.
- I moved here to Bethlehem, made an investment, live in the downtown. I moved here because of the safety and quality of life in Bethlehem, and I have experienced the Bethlehem police on multiple occasions . . .
- I have the utmost respect for the Bethlehem police department and what they do and also the Bethlehem Fire Department. I think we have two of the finest public safety departments anywhere in the state, and I encourage you not to jump to any conclusions, especially in regard to defunding.