

The Zoning Board controversy: part 8

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Serious Issues August 26, 2019

(The latest in a series of posts on City government)

The last 15 minutes of the August 20 City Council meeting were especially painful to Gadfly.

A few people he talked with felt the final colloquy (good SAT word) between Councilman Callahan and Councilman Reynolds was cathartic and thus healthy.

Feelings bottled up finally let loose.

Things needing to be said, said.

Ability now to start fresh.

Gadfly could not find that optimism.

Judge for yourself. He welcomes different perspectives.

(A reminder again that you can see the meeting for yourself: [“Zoning Hearing Board appointment withdrawn, Council discussion ensues”](#) or [the City web site](#) for audio and video.)

From the beginning BC rather relentlessly pushed PVW and JWR for a response to his pointed commentary.

Egged them on.

In words such as: "Everybody talks about openness" . . . "honest open debate in front of people" . . . "Let's have the debate" . . . "What are you afraid of?" . . . "No more backroom phone calls" . . . "I'm all ears."

(Out of the loop spectators like Gadfly could only wonder what of such seriousness some members of Council were doing out of public view and perhaps BC's view.)

JWR finally took him up.

Watch what you ask for "they" always say.

For JWR talked not of issues, but — offering the "honesty" BC asked for — talked about BC himself and his relationship with Council.

Strong talk. Not in a vindictive but a clinical tone.

Describing dysfunction and fracture long in the making.

JWR: You are "angry and frustrated." Your response to people, "rather than respectful merit-based disagreement," is perceived by many, though maybe not intended as such, as personal. "It is not the way things are done here successfully." Sometimes you say things I agree with, sometimes I definitely disagree, but "what I almost always think is that I disagree with the way you say it." "It is sad, it's disappointing, it's difficult to watch the way that I think that you portray and share your feelings." You are working for a certain kind of response, and I will not play in to that because "it is not the way to move forward." "Most of us have no working relationship with you any more." "The way to persuade is to have a working positive relationship." "Your problem is the fact that you do not have good relationships."

Powerful stuff. Months ago president AW referred to JWR — 12 years on Council — by some such phrase as “elder statesman.” I forget exactly what the phrase was. But Gadfly thought of that moment. Earlier in the meeting — being a bit reflective on his tenure himself — JWR talked of things he’s learned “over the years.”

Frankly — and feel free to disagree here — based on BC’s deportment (good SAT word) in the previous 3/4’s of an hour, JWR’s words had the ring of truth.

The reason Gadfly can’t feel optimistic stems from BC’s response to the openness he desired.

JWR’s words did not stimulate reflection but defense.

BC countered with “I have great relationships” with members of Council, citing casual contacts.

BC countered with some personal anecdotes such as JWR calling PVW “some names which I won’t repeat” (which JWR denied). Did we need to hear this?

BC explained some aspects of his relationship with JWR that ended in this fashion: “When you lied to me and stuck it in my back that’s when I stopped having a discussion with you because I’m a man of principle. . . . You in my eyes did something that I thought was unethical.”

Without any details.

What Gadfly would consider innuendo (good SAT word).

All of this made Gadfly feel very uneasy.

As if an accidental auditor of a private conversation with no way to escape without revealing himself.

Like a gaper passing a car wreck.

BC's "this has been a great debate" totally missed the point for Gadfly.

Even after president AW rebutted BC's assessment of the night work as a great debate as "not very productive to relationships on Council nor helpful to anyone in the room" (and by extension the rest of the public watching on the livestream or following on this blog), BC thanked him for the opportunity to "vent" and hoped for continuing open debate "and honest and fair discussion in front of everybody."

Gadfly might be dead wrong on his negative take on the entire Zoning Board discussion section of the August 20 Council meeting.

And he would like to repeat that the negative take has nothing to do with Nominee-1. As Gadfly said earlier: "He should have made clearer that he was implying nothing evil, shady, dishonest about [Nominee-1's] character. She has an enviable record of public service. On many a City ABC she would be a welcome addition. But in Gadfly's opinion she was an obvious mismatch in appearance and optics for this position, and the Mayor was tone-deaf in nominating her."

And he will repeat as well his rationale for the long examination: "One of the goals of the Gadfly project is to help you know your City officials better, so you will have a better idea whom to vote or not vote for when the time comes. Before he became a Gadfly, Gadfly never felt he had enough information at voting time to make a truly responsible choice. So Gadfly feels that it worthwhile to examine this section of the Council meeting in some detail. We will learn something about our elected officials."

And also repeating that contrary views are invited.