

Discussion of the golf course budget drifts off the fairway

The Bethlehem Gadfly Budget, City government, Ethics, Serious Issues November 16, 2019

 9th in a series of posts on the 2020 Budget 

Before going any further, Gadfly invites you to spend a light few minutes with the public comment by Jack Hoy (Huy?) at the last City Council meeting.

82-year-old Mr. Hoy gave us all a few chuckles as, bringing several clubs as exhibits, he proclaimed his pride and appreciation in the Bethlehem Golf Course that signaled the dramatic, positive change there over the past year.

Hoy was such a great warm and sincere salesman for this major part of our recreational system that at Wednesday's budget hearing Council members quipped that he was a plant by Business Manager Eric Evans to support the Golf budget statements.

<https://youtu.be/zC8qzxVD5ts>

You might remember that back in 2018 the golf course was a hot issue. It was losing money and deteriorating in quality. Should we sell it, lease it, dedicate a pot of money to it?? Tricky issue. And a high priority for many vocal residents.

There was a meeting in which Town Hall was filled with angry and concerned golfers, the like of which Gadfly hadn't seen and won't soon forget.

Business Manager Eric Evans seemed to take charge of the course's fate, advocating for a viable future path. The decision was to make the course operate as a business and to be self-supporting, and Larry Kelchner — a retired businessman — was hired to manage the course.

Mr. Kelchner was impressive at the budget hearing Wednesday, and the performance of the course over the year has even changed Councilwoman Van Wirt's mind about it — because last year she was skeptical about the course's future.

So Mr. Kelchner pretty much simply received plaudits and engaged in congenial conversation till it was if someone stepped on a landmine unobtrusively planted in a fairway and for several minutes the meeting blew up.

Please go to the City video of Wednesday's budget hearing #2, [part 4](#) min. 21:20 to the end and [part #5](#) up to min. 12:15.

You know that an important part of Gadfly's mission is to help and encourage you to know your Councilpeople so that when it comes time to vote you are doing so as well informed as you can be.

This 15 mins. is well worth viewing in this respect.

Councilman Callahan raised a legitimate question about the difference in cost between adults and kids for greens fees and season passes but not at the driving range and claimed that was driving (no pun intended) kids away from golfing there.

For instance, a round of golf on the 18hole course is \$24 for adults, \$16 for kids, but at the driving range it's \$10/bucket for both — same price. At one point BC seemed to be asking for a reduction to \$5, on the grounds that the differential in the other fees made the case that we recognized that kids can't afford the same as adults.

And, said BC, the consequence was that the kids were not using the facility because of the cost — kids whom BC wanted there to keep them off the streets.

So far so good.

On its face, that is not unreasonable.

Then things went out of bounds.

At one one point BC seemed to be saying that there were no kids at the course because of this fee differential while LK was saying that there were plenty of kids there.

In answer to BC, EE and LK said the fee at the driving range was “industry standard” and documented various examples of their generous involvement with and solicitation of junior golfers.

But BC wouldn't seem to accept that explanation and pressed on.

Tension escalated when Councilwoman Van Wirt tried to get the discussion to move on, which met with a curt response from BC, and pretty soon there were hard words between President Waldron and BC, including suggestions that BC was arguing for special interests — for example, “paving” was mentioned, seemingly totally unrelated to the golf discussion.

Odd. Where did that come from? One of those times where other people know things you don't. Other issues bubbling under the surface. And you feel left out of the conversation.

Paving?

Gadfly was not sure of what AW spoke, but he immediately thought of BC at the first budget hearing indicating twice that major road work was needed. Major paving.

Had BC been promoting paving interests there?

In any event, BC was rather heatedly defensive, and protested unfairness.

Now Gadfly — as always — suggests you go to the tape yourself and make judgment if judgment needs to be made.

Perhaps Gadfly will only say that there is a “history” of BC interactions with Council members that has resulted in short fuses among his colleagues.

Tempers escalate quickly.

After a previous Council flare-up involving BC (the Zoning Board nomination issue about which Gadfly devoted 10 posts), Gadfly responded to President Waldron’s invitation (to us all) to comment on the way he handles discussion.

[Gadfly suggested](#) that President Waldron consider a discussion rule based in Roberts Rules:

- a limit of 10 minutes, then others are given an opportunity to speak
- after others have spoken or passed on the opportunity to speak, another 10 minutes
- any further 10-minute time after that only with majority vote of the other Council members

After you view the tape of this heated episode, however, Gadfly suggests that you go back and bask in Mr. Hoy’s ray of golf course sunshine again.

Gadfly bets his game is as sharp as his wit.