

Loosening up for the Public Safety meeting

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing February 28, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts in the wake of the George Floyd murder* 

Ok, for the past 24 hours Gadfly has been mentally limbering up for the Public Safety Committee meeting 5:30 Tuesday night.

He could go on and mention that a video surfaced showing the **man with a gun with suicide on his mind** killed by Pennsylvania State Police shows the man with his hands up when so killed.

He could wonder why there was no follow-up information that he could discover on a **“mentally distressed” man with a sword** killed by an officer in Pennsburg.

He could tell you about **the police who stopped a guy walking at night** whose only crime was that he was an odd duck, put him in a chokehold, put a spit bag on him, precipitated injuries from which he would die, mocked him, argued that they were simply following policies implemented by city leadership, and buried the body-cam videos.

But enough.

Enough to remind him that there is enough evidence around in the post-GeorgeFloyd era for our police department, for every police department to undergo self-scrutiny about procedures and practices.

And for City Council to assure that it is being done.

Gadfly is suggesting nothing nefarious about our police department. With its double certification, he assumes the department is as well trained as possible.

But he has said that such visible, public analysis simply makes sense in the post-GeorgeFloyd era.

The international furor over the killing of George Floyd plus the hiring of a new Chief of Police mark the perfect moment to take significant stock of department operation.

So perhaps Tuesday's meeting on "Police reorganization" will get in to this.

But anything that smacks of criticism of the police will inevitably be a political hot potato.

We've already seen a local group applying the heat.

Gadfly thought **Councilwoman Crampsie Smith** hit the right note, the right balance in her re-election comments before Lehigh Valley for All February 17: "I come from a family of cops, but I also see that you can support the police but also address and fight systemic racism because they are not two mutually exclusive items."

So far one of the two mayoral candidates has **foregrounded public safety** in his platform pronouncements.

One of the candidates for Council has put herself behind "re-imagining public safety": "This to me means not just looking at policing in a vacuum but integrating our approach to public health and our approach to policing. I do think that Chief Kott is on the right track in a lot of ways, but I would love to be there as well to ask how we approach that. There are a lot of new models in cities that are bringing out social workers, public health professionals who are disrupting the police engagement when people are in crisis over things that are non-violent and non-criminal."

That same candidate has boldly said "Black lives matter and Latino lives matter," and we know that policing is inextricably tied to racial issues.

So Gadfly hopes that there will be political pressure to keep public safety in front of us.

One week to the day after the May election will be the one year anniversary of the George Floyd killing. All cities in the country will be asked to show what they have done in response.