

# Important that elected officials don't jump to conclusions and act without hearing from all sides

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police August 11, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police 

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Gadfly,

I've been trying to keep up with all that is being written and said on this issue and how it relates to systemic racism in America. I've spoken with many people from a variety of backgrounds. My list of suggestions and observations is by no means complete. However, I believe there are some very fundamental steps that could be taken and explored. They are in no particular order.

Dana

Personally, I think there is too much rhetoric flying around and some people are not using common sense. Law enforcement is a necessity to maintain an orderly and safe society, period. So, calls to eliminate policing anywhere make no sense to me.

If I was the Mayor, I would be setting up community forums to receive commentary from all sides of the issue. I would make it as easy as possible for people to weigh in and would take steps to allow and encourage all voices to be heard so that the discourse is fair. Given the pandemic, these might need to be virtual meetings, but I think before anything is done we need to hear more from all corners of the city. Some residents and a business owner have expressed their concerns to me about retribution if they speak up in any way that might be construed as opposition to the current dialogue.

I don't like the term defund because in my mind and for many others it has a negative connotation. I understand what is meant by it, but if this was a company trying to sell a product and they continually used terms that turned off their potential market and customers, their product wouldn't sell. I think it frightens a lot of residents who recognize that we need law enforcement and that overall we have a pretty good PD in Bethlehem, but who also believe strongly in equal application of our laws.

That being said, I think we should always be looking for ways to improve the PD, especially in the area of relationships with all corners of our community.

More regular de-escalation training is a start. I don't know the current frequency. I do believe that when any officer responds to a call their primary intent should be to maintain the peace. I also recognize that in some situations this may not be possible because of the heightened seriousness of a situation.

I think if there is a bad cop on the force, the process for removing them should be fair, yet swift.

If there is a way to mesh social services with law enforcement, I support that union in situations where it is applicable. Mental health issues have normally been the responsibility of state and county, so I'm not sure if cities have that capacity. I think it makes sense to hire police officers who also have a broader academic background such as in sociology as well as law enforcement. Perhaps degrees in criminal justice, of which I have no familiarity, need to incorporate a minor in sociology?

I think community policing has become a lost art in Bethlehem and would look to re-establish team policing and neighborhood bike patrols the way I remember and experienced them in the past. When the same officers worked in the same neighborhoods, they built relationships with residents and established a higher level of trust and respect between themselves and decent law-abiding citizens from all walks of life. A number of retired Bethlehem officers that I know feel those efforts achieved a great deal of success.

A former police officer has mentioned to me that the pressure-point training officers used to receive allowed them to better control a physical altercation. This would reduce the potential for the use of lethal force if that training was re-introduced and emphasized the way it apparently once was.

More minority hires would be helpful in law enforcement as I believe that a police force and the community are better served if they mirror each other in composition. From all I've read and been told law enforcement recruitment has become a challenge. What are those challenges, and how do you overcome them?

When I was hired by the city, all city employees including police had to be city residents. That was eliminated in 1988, so officers can now be hired from anywhere. Many new hires don't have the in-place relationships with the community that generations of officers before them had. My personal preference would be to see some limits on where they must live, like in the city or in any municipality contiguous with the city as an example. This way they are more local and there's a better chance for them to get to know the community than if they are living in the out-of-state or in the Poconos, as examples. I'm not sure how the FOP union feels about that, but I think it's a discussion that should take place.

It's my understanding that racial sensitivity training is already being done. Perhaps there can be more frequent or an updated method of training, if there are any alternative newer ways of looking at this. I feel very strongly as a lifetime resident of Bethlehem that my minority friends should be treated no differently than I would be, when interacting with a Bethlehem officer.

I've read that the school district and city are looking at whether school resource police officers are needed in our middle and high schools. The need for that has been raised by minority students. The data needs to be analyzed to see whether it's effective or not

What I think is really important is that elected officials don't jump to conclusions and act without hearing from all sides of the issue. Listening is critical.

We need to find the right balance between having effective law enforcement and meeting community needs and expectations. Knee-jerk reactions will not serve Bethlehem or any community well. The burden for achieving this doesn't just fall on police; it falls on each of us because of the social contract we have in our free society.