

Follow-up to and fallout from the Zoning Board nomination controversy (3)

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Serious Issues September 17, 2019

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

Council meeting tonight.

Two meetings ago — August 20 — we had the long “debate” over the Zoning Board nomination. Gadfly spent 9 posts on that, beginning [here](#).

One meeting ago — September 3 — we had the follow-up to that “debate.” Gadfly devoted 2 posts to that, beginning [here](#).

But he left that [second post](#) with a “to be continued,” a promise that should be fulfilled before the meeting tonight.

Gadfly wants to say something about Councilman Callahan and about President Waldron, but mostly about President Waldron.

Gadfly has said one of the purposes of his project is helping you know your elected officials better, especially so that you will be better informed when it comes time to vote (some Council members, you can be sure, will run for re-election, and, you know, some might even think of running for Mayor! Be prepared!).

Gadfly did not like the August 20 performance. He felt guilty, like a gaper at a car wreck. Stephen Antalics felt “deeply embarrassed.” People who reported to President Waldron found it “cringe-worthy.” Gadfly faulted BC. Not everyone did, of course.

But, though faulting BC, Gadfly has to admit that his “defense” at the September 3 meeting (as outlined by Gadfly [here](#)) was masterful. He began with testimonies approving his behavior; he made the solicitor acknowledge that the rules were on his side; he used direct audio evidence (stunning! ballsy!) to make his central point; and he APOLOGIZED. Gadfly was in awe of BC’s *technique*. And remembered that he has seen BC do the “Perry Mason” (look it up, young ‘uns!) thing before, especially leading Robert Novatnack down a path of one-word yes/no answers to make a point that supported his position in an aspect of the Martin Tower controversy. Gadfly must point out, however, that BC’s apology was framed by blaming Councilman Reynolds for starting the nastiness (BC was only reacting to provocation), and he not only did not back off but reiterated his unspecified charge on JWR. So we might put “apology” in quotes just to get us to think about it some more.

But it’s the punctuation (sorry, ever the English prof) that President Waldron put on this Zoning Board episode on which Gadfly would like to focus most attention.

The trials of leadership.

Here again is the “period” AW put on the episode ([see the video here](#)):

“I’m gonna try to enforce the rules moving forward fairly and consistently. That becomes challenging when rules are habitually broken, and I’m trying to give guidance and my guidance is pushed aside. I think everyone has a right to be heard, and I think they have a right to speak, from members of the public to members of Council. I’ve been criticized for having a light gavel in the past, and I can promise you I will continue to have a light gavel. I don’t think silencing people’s thoughts and opinions is a productive way to continue a conversation. With that being said, I do think there should be a level of decorum and respect for each other in the room. And I think at times at the last

Council meeting that was not there. I did not get any feedback publicly that that was a positive conversation. In fact, many people reached out to me that I saw and said that it was cringe-worthy and it was embarrassing. I think the tone of that conversation wasn't helpful, and it's my opinion that I think we can do better and we must do better when we get in to the dangerous territory of accusing people of things on Council, whether that's members of Council accusing each other of something or members of the public accusing, because that happens quite a lot, and I don't gavel that down much the same way people go over the 5-minute time limit and I don't gavel that down. I think people should be heard. Whether you agree with that opinion or not, the First Amendment is wide-ranging and it supersedes Roberts' Rules of Order. But I would hope that we would have the respect for each other to adhere to those, so that the conversation can be productive. I hear a lot different kind of tone than I did last week, Mr. Callahan, and I appreciate that you were reflective on that, and I think open debate is a good thing. I think we should hold each other accountable for our thoughts and actions as well, and I think moving forward taking a little time to consider how our words are affecting other people in the room, it's going to be beneficial. So I look forward to continuing this conversation publicly. Whether it's warranted that people think the rules are being violated — Roberts' Rules — which I think they are — I'm going to enforce them pretty liberally because I think the conversation should be open and fair, and I'm going to take remarks from members of Council if they want to give a little course correction and think that I should enforce the rules a little differently. I'll listen to the majority of Council if they have a strong opinion that the rules should be enforced differently. Although I'm currently president of Council, I would welcome feedback from members of Council if they think I should have a different approach. And I'll try to balance those in the future as we continue these conversations under new business."

Gadfly is sympathetic. He administered a department of 60-some people for a decade.

All individualists, as professionals in the humanities, and especially the field of English are wont to be.

What kind of a leader is AW, at least as revealed in this episode?

AW realizes that he's been criticized for being soft.

Gadfly has seen AW extend a long leash at times during public comment even when the audience is visibly restive.

Gadfly has benefited from that softness as he yacks on and on over his 5 minutes during public comment . He has even called AW Mr. SoftGavel in these pages.

He's patient. Gadfly loved AW's quip August 20 about potty-training twins.

But AW's patience did reach a limit August 20, and Gadfly thinks Council might benefit from some rules — as suggested by Mr. Antalics and even invited by AW.

Hence, a modest proposal — actually a version of rules Gadfly has seen in Robert's 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

Gadfly believes that AW's instinct toward openness is right — if you are going to err, do it on the side of more communication rather than less — but August 20 showed that some broad rules are necessary when unpleasantness occurs.