

Enforcement concerns a “minor tidbit” and possibly a “stalling” tactic

The Bethlehem Gadfly Wage equality March 9, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on wage equality* 

Wage Equality Memo (1)

A few posts ago, Gadfly asked you to watch a long — 30 minutes — section of the February 25 Human Resources committee meeting on Councilman Callahan’s proposed wage equality ordinance.

The reason: that final half-hour of the meeting does not break up easily into discrete chunks, and you can’t really understand it unless you hear the whole sequence and know the whole context.

There is a kind of rhythm, a kind of crescendo movement that you have to experience to understand what Gadfly sees as the significance of this section of the meeting as part of his goal to help you understand our elected officials better so that you can be the most informed voter you can be.

This section of the meeting has been talked about and written about, and Gadfly feels that it is susceptible to some distortion if sound bites are lifted out of context. Gadfly hopes you did listen to the whole 30-minute section or will return to do so.

For now he’s going to try to explain what he meant in a previous post by seeing in this section “a kind of rhythm, a kind of crescendo movement.”

In Gadfly’s view, Councilman Callahan exhibits a kind of repetitive stubbornness in that last half-hour of the meeting that escalates tension among committee members to a point that produces some generally regrettable behavior.

See if you agree.

Here is the first 11 minutes of that 30-minute stretch. It begins with Councilman Callahan, at the request of Councilwoman Van Wirt, seeking input from Councilwoman Crampsie Smith and ends with a motion by

Councilwoman Van Wirt to table (later modified to postpone) action on the proposal: <https://youtu.be/iAI8Blqt-oY>

The repetitive movement Gadfly sees is each Councilwoman making some suggestion or comment and, in response, Chair Callahan basically repeating his same unbudging position, as if not deeply listening to or understanding the women, creating a kind of pressure that was bound to blow.

1) mins 0 – 2:30: Councilwoman Crampsie Smith, in a very calm voice, indicates her support for the ordinance but focuses on the question of enforcement and wonders if it is appropriate to table the proposal for two weeks or so and come back and “wrap our heads” around the enforcement aspect, offering suggestions to see what other cities are doing or to discuss options again with the City. Councilman Callahan’s answer is not directed to the enforcement issue at all but to aspects of his proposal that will insure the business community knows about the ordinance: letters along with business licenses, a one-year delay, information on the city web site, information in the city newsletter.

2) mins 2:30 – 4:00: Councilwoman Negron, in a very calm voice, indicates her support for the “wise” suggestion to table by Councilwoman Crampsie Smith, to give time to benefit by Solicitor Spirk’s research on her enforcement suggestion, to give Councilwoman Van Wirt time to do research on “salary sharing,” and come back and pass the ordinance. Councilman Callahan wonders if you are not comfortable with some “minor tidbit” (a particularly incendiary phrase!) whether they just can’t pass it through to Council as a whole, giving a whole month for additions to be done. Councilman Callahan does not register a sense of the gravity of the concerns and exhibits only a desire to pass the ordinance through to Council.

3) mins 4:00 – 9:00: Councilwoman Van Wirt, with clarity and firmness, indicates that Councilman Callahan is “underestimating” the “gating event” — the aggrieved women marshaling resources and getting a lawyer, describing her own experience and a \$5000 cost. She points out the Human Rights Commissions that other cities have and we don’t, the support of the three women on Council for a short delay, and the need to “get it right.” Councilman Callahan doesn’t see the need to hire a

layer for that kind of money, indicates violators would probably be doing this with multiple women (relevance?), and that he wants to get the ordinance to full Council where perhaps it would be tabled. He focuses on the ample time before it comes to Council to consider amendments, indicates everybody had ample time to bring amendments to this meeting and raises the notion of “stalling” without direct accusation (again incendiary!). Councilman Callahan then raises the possibility of throwing the enforcement back to our Human Relations Commission or our Human Resources department — both ideas effectively discounted by the other Councilors.

4) min 9:00 – 9:50: Councilwoman Crampsie Smith, in calm voice, suggests exploring such options as Legal Aid, women’s groups, a Washington Human Rights campaign. Councilman Callahan does not respond to or acknowledge the Councilwoman’s points at all.

5) min 9:50 – 11:15: instead, Councilman Callahan addresses Councilwoman Van Wirt about the idea of drafting more citizen volunteers and then, returning to his main desire, asking her again for amendments now.

6) min 11:15: Chair Callahan moves toward calling for a vote on the proposed ordinance, but Councilwoman Van Wirt beats him to it with a motion to table (later amended to a motion to postpone), seconded by Councilwoman Negrón.

We’ll stop our analysis right here for now.

Do you see the troubling rhythm to the discussion that Gadfly does? More on that later.

For now, grab your well worn copy of Robert’s Rules.

What should follow a motion to table or a motion to postpone (which Solicitor Spirk sees was truly Councilwoman Van Wirt’s intent)? C’mon, look it up.

Gadfly thinks what should have happened at this moment didn’t happen — and thus the agony of the rest of the meeting. Next time.