

Gadfly suggests a “first contact” focus

The Bethlehem Gadfly Police November 2, 2020

🦋 *Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police* 🦋

Committee of the Whole meeting, October 29, 2020

[Meeting documents here](#)

[view meeting here](#)

*“We’re not talking about things, it seems to me, that really matter.”
The Gadfly*

ref: **“I didn’t hear anything that I wanted to hear or anything that I felt I needed to hear”**

ref: **audio clip: Gadfly comment at Committee of the Whole October 22**

Gadfly was really cranky at the Committee of the Whole meeting last Thursday.

He even declaimed that the new Chief of Police needed to “step up.” O my. Not good. Whoa, Gadfly.

So cranky that he knew he had to step away for a couple days.

And did.

Now back.

Gadfly realizes he’s been like a one-man band on the issue of a tough conversation with our police.

Nobody else seems to care.

That doesn’t mean Gadfly sees anything wrong with our police department.





However, he does remember the “warrior” recruiting video on the department web site not too long ago that came down as soon as it received attention. And mindful of the adage that a Chief sets the tone for a department, Gadfly remembers that the past Chief was on (perhaps for innocent reason) a questionable web site, from which he made a racially insensitive re-post, and for which he did not admit or acknowledge or apologize for the insensitivity. Gadfly remembers that in the early post-GeorgeFloyd era discussions, the Chief kind of blamed the victim, indicating officers respond in proportion to the violence offered to them, missing the point of subjects with mental health issues incapable of responding rationally to police orders. Gadfly also remembers that the past Chief lept probably over-quickly to the defense of a possibly racially insensitive issue with an officer in the “Hayes St. traffic stop” incident. And Gadfly has heard of at least one case involving a department officer in Pennsylvania Eastern District Court.

Such things aside, it’s just that *every* department in this post-GeorgeFloyd moment should be undergoing rigorous self-analysis.

And Gadfly is impatient with our seeming reluctance to face the real problem.

The City threw everything plus the kitchen sink at Council Thursday night, obfuscating the core issue.

Gadfly keeps hearing the biting comment by an “activist” at an early City Council meeting (July 7?), something to the effect that we don’t need any more pizza parties.

It seemed to Gadfly that the real issue got lost Thursday night.

If it were Gadfly’s meeting (such hubris!), he would have thrown this image up on the screen:

And asked such questions as “How are our officers trained to handle a situation like this?” “If you agree that there was not a good outcome here for either the subject, or the officers (it must be shattering to kill some one in any circumstance), or the community, how do we avoid such an outcome?”

For it is precisely the “first contact” between officer and subject in an incident like this that is the exquisitely visible problem in policing that is being discussed across the country as a result of a series of tragic outcomes.

I would ask the department heads to focus on the “first contact” and then to draw concentric circles around it from their different perspectives, talking to each other, talking alternatives.

Too much of the talk Thursday night was on the margins, on the periphery.

I would ask the department heads to get out of their silos, focus on a first contact situation like just happened in Philadelphia, and brainstorm courses of action that might keep such a tragedy from happening here.

For that’s what worries Gadfly — a tragedy like that happening here.

Is Gadfly alone in this worry?

Are we immune?

He’s sure Kenosha and Ferguson never expected to happen what did.

Gadfly thinks assurance on that score (as much as humanly possible, of course) is what we residents need to hear.

And we heard nothing of the sort Thursday night.

Gadfly can imagine our department is well trained. His memory reaches to examples of de-escalation of jumpers on the Fahy Bridge and the climber down at Steel Stacks.

But training in handling of “first contact” situations has not been explained to us.

We don't even know if such incidents as the Philadelphia one, as with Jacob Blake, as with Rayshard Brooks, and so forth have occasioned any action within the department — any refresher training, any consciousness raising.

The silence from the City and our willingness to accept the silence is puzzling and troubling to the Gadfly.

to be continued . . .