

Should the public have access to police body cam and dashboard cam footage?

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police June 18, 2020

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

Under new business at Tuesday's City Council meeting, Councilwoman Negrón asked this interesting question related to the ongoing discussion of police procedures in the wake of the shootings of George Floyd and Rayshard Brooks. The Mayor promised a response to Councilwoman Negrón the following day. Gadfly hopes she will share it with us.

Audio Player not available in this archive

- We've had improvements with cameras, both dashboard and body cams.
- But how is that really helping the citizens?
- Is there a process by which a citizen can request the footage when they have been stopped?
- I would like to see the footage of a few individuals who have been stopped and told me bad stories.
- If what I have been told is a lie, I would be the first to apologize.
- But I have heard too many stories otherwise, and we need a mechanism, a right-to-know request or something, that would be a better fix for both the officer and the subject.
- Just like we can request a police report for a car accident, we need to be able to request the footage.
- As a Councilperson, I hear stories, and I would like to see if what the people are saying is true. It would hold them accountable. Are they lying to me? It would hold the officer accountable too.

Gadfly finds this question of access to police videos very interesting.

Councilwoman Negrón hears a lot of stories about police/resident interaction. She's trusted. Gadfly imagines her as a giant ear into which all of the anguish on the Southside pours. Not an enviable position.

It probably does not surprise you that Gadfly hears a decent amount about police/resident interaction too. Comes with the territory. But the stories kind of paralyze him. The people will not come forward. What do they expect him to do? Publishing one side of an event makes him feel very uneasy. And, frankly, he leans toward trusting the police.

As followers might remember, Gadfly did get his shorts in a bunch over the traffic stop of an Hispanic man on September 11, 2019, at 6th and Hayes — a stop that made blog news in February and March after the arresting officer felt that the local judge was accusing him of being a racist. One thing that bothered Gadfly was what seemed to be the Chief's premature action in supporting the officer without interaction with the complainant (who was not the subject of the stop) and, in return, accusing the complainant of unethical behavior to his superior. It turned out that significantly later the officer was cleared in an internal investigation based mainly on camera evidence. The question naturally and logically followed about why the Chief did not cite that camera footage immediately to the local judge and his superior, offer to review it, and have a conversation about whether there was any racially insensitive behavior on the part of the officer — and thus perhaps totally avoid the ugly brouhaha that ensued. It seemed like a game of I have the evidence, you don't, and I'm not going to show it to you. Fair? It may be beside the point now, but the letter about this matter hand-delivered by the judge/complainant to the Mayor and City Council on December 23, 2019, has, as far as Gadfly knows, not received either acknowledgment or response.

Relative to Councilwoman Negron's point, there was camera footage, and it was only available to one side.

Now at the very beginning of the Tuesday City Council meeting, Officer William Audelo made a long and passionate statement. Gadfly will post about this shortly. Gadfly is not quite sure at this time if Officer Audelo was referring to the same case mentioned above, but he was angry and frustrated at allegations against an officer. Gadfly needs to and will refresh himself on the Officer's statement, as well as provide it to you for your own judgment, but, as he remembers it, Officer Audelo says he has seen video and if we could see the video we would see how wrong the charges are.

Yes. Councilwoman Negron's point exactly. And Gadfly agrees with her that he would be the first one to say sorry and even do penance (Catholic upbringing!) if shown that evidence so compelling to others. But, cloaked in secrecy as the handling of that case was, there was no closure. There could be no trust.

Is there a fair way to stop this game if we've got the evidence and you don't? This game of "Trust us."

Good question, Councilwoman.

to be continued . . .