

Councilman Colon: a lot of fear but not a lot of understanding

The Bethlehem Gadfly Budget, Lehigh Valley Good Neighbors Alliance, Police December 8, 2020

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

The sense of injustice that most Council members felt at the actions by the Lehigh Valley Good Neighbors Alliance might best be registered by the response by Councilman Colon the night of the December 1 Council meeting.

In his more than two years of Council watching, Gadfly never saw Councilman Colon so exasperated.

The always pleasant, always cheery, always even tempered, always brief Councilman was, in Gadfly's view, quite a bit off his equilibrium in his longest commentary in Gadfly's tenure (8 mins.). Not, it seemed to Gadfly, "appalled and angry" like Councilwoman Crampsie Smith, but pained and frustrated.

- What I heard tonight was a lot of fear but not a lot of understanding.
- As Councilmembers we are tasked with looking at things from everybody who calls in and understanding that life looks a lot different depending on what lens you are looking at it from.
- This heightened sense of fear that we heard tonight . . . where's this coming from? . . . what's driving some of this? . . .
- this idea that there's a nefarious, clandestine, undermining of the police department and beyond our police department our City's sense of feeling safe in our residents' own homes . . . and drumming up the sense that looming around the corner is us,

the City Council, with this plot to kinda push Bethlehem over a cliff into chaos.



- And we hear these anecdotal notions of other cities and what's going on . . .
- this idea that if it weren't for Council being called out that we were ready to unplug the energy of Bethlehem . . .
- or that conversations going back to over the summer where we tried to understand where people were coming from . . .
- people who feel that they are walking around with targets on their backs, whether real or perceived . . .
- we heard tonight, some people who say that they can't call the police

- then on the other end of the spectrum people who feel that they can't go to bed at night because they don't know if there's going to be someone to call if they need help.
- Or to the brave men and women who actually punch a clock every day and put on a badge feeling that they aren't being supported or that they are walking around with a target on their back . . .
- A lot of this fear, but not a lot of understanding.
- Talking about something that happened more recently, we all lauded an appointment that came before us with our new Chief of Police, Chief Kott, that passed unanimously, without question, not only did everyone vote in favor of Chief Kott, everyone sung her praise, justly so . . .
- After the new year we should have conversations about hiring practices within the police department, promotions within the police department, what police responses look like, what our policies . . . and also visit the pilot program with the Health Bureau . . .
- Previous to this fury of emails we had already established that at a budget hearing that we were not taking any positions away from the police department.
- It's a matter of understanding comprehensively how we operate a city . . .
- I invite . . . anyone interested in learning anything, tune in.
- Don't just take it from a Facebook post, get it from the source, tune in to a Council meeting . . .
- We're getting emails from people telling us not to do something that we have not had discussions to do.
- Acknowledging that there are people who think different than you not that they are trying to plunge Bethlehem into an anarchist state but that they want to look at things in a certain way to accomplish goals.
- And that's not going to happen overnight . . . these things don't happen with a flip of the switch.

- hope that we as a Council, outside of some of the other forces that be . . . continue to offer understanding of each other, of the different perspectives, and really try to diminish fears out there . . .
- that we are behind closed doors in the shadows plotting to turn Bethlehem into some sort of chaotic city, which there's nothing to support that.

The Bethlehem Gadfly