

Candidates speaking to the BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities

The Bethlehem Gadfly Candidates for election, Election April 2, 2021

 Latest in a series of posts on candidates for election 

Lehigh Valley Stands Up (LVSU) is a grassroots multi-racial working class force for transformative political change in the Lehigh Valley. We empower constituents and public servants alike to address systemic causes of inequity at the heart of our mission, especially the systems that disproportionately impact our marginalized communities, such as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC); Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer (LGBTQIA+); disabled; and otherwise vulnerable residents.

Mayoral candidate Dana Grubb and City Council Candidates Hillary Kwiatek and Kiera Wilhelm committed to the **LVSU 2021 Movement Pledge** and completed a 9-question questionnaire “intended to help the members of Lehigh Valley Stands Up (LVSU) understand how you view the world and the political issues that face the Lehigh Valley.”

You can find each candidate’s complete questionnaire here: **LVSU Dana Grubb, LVSU Hillary Kwiatek, LVSU Kiera Wilhelm.**

Question #2, for instance, asked, “What do you believe are the biggest issues facing BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ constituents? How does it fit into your campaign priorities?”

Here’s how our three candidates answered that question:

Dana Grubb: “Two of my priorities are inclusivity and excellence of service; city staff and city authorities, boards, and commissions will reflect the diversity of Bethlehem. BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities are not only under recognized and under supported, they are under utilized. In seeking out the best to serve our community, all constituents will be encouraged, welcomed and considered by my administration for appointments.”

Hillary Kwiatek: “In my conversations with BIPOC community members, I often hear the themes that are common to the experience of BIPOC Americans in general: Racism continues to pose great challenges in access to economic opportunity and generational wealth. Access to quality healthcare (including during the pandemic) and nutritious food is not equitable in our city. The way the police treat BIPOC community members is different than how they treat white community members. I have also heard particularly from Latinx South Side residents that there has been too much focus on higher end rental housing development and not enough focus on the community’s needs. All of these concerns are all aligned with my campaign priorities of fighting for transparent economic development that provides family-sustaining wages, reimagining public safety, expanding municipal public health, and increasing access to affordable housing.

In the LGBTQIA+ community, there are many experiences, including the experiences of those who exist at the intersection of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ identities. In Bethlehem, our municipal government has passed ordinances of inclusivity, including a ban on conversion therapy. I have heard from my LGBTQIA+ neighbors and friends that they generally feel welcome here, but that may not be the case for all LGBTQIA+ Bethlehem residents.

As the mother of a transgender young woman, I am especially focused on making sure that Bethlehem continues to be a welcoming and inclusive place for her and for all of our LGBTQIA+ residents in the face of the growing movement seeking to stem the tide of progress in our country.

If I am elected, I pledge to greatly increase the amount of interaction city council has with members of Bethlehem’s vulnerable and marginalized communities, including convening town halls and/or hearings on site in impacted neighborhoods.

Kiera Wilhelm: “This question is challenging to answer, because there are so many issues that any BIPOC or LGBTQIA+ individual faces, on any given day. Each at the time will feel—and therefore is—the most significant. Especially as someone who is not a member of either community, my job is to listen, and to learn.

There are foundations of systemic, historic, deep-seated bias that underlie the daily inequities faced by both populations. Challenging this bias is crucial work that extends beyond my run for Council, or beyond any one election. It's a long haul. Inequities must be addressed, every day, at every level, by me, and by all of us. By challenging our own assumptions; through our interactions with family and friends; by enacting policies that advance justice and equity, and amending policies that do not. By enabling and empowering marginalized communities, and correcting past injustices.

Guided by the lived experiences of those in the BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities, I will work, every day, to be a voice on Council that strives to represent their needs and experience; that ensures that they feel safe and heard, and can live without discrimination, harassment, or violence.