

Van Wirt Puts Her Boots on the Ground (39)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Gadfly's posts, Parking, Serious Issues October 14, 2018

(39th in a series of posts on parking)

Gadfly followers will remember that he has whined about the lack of the merchant voice in the run-up to the decisions on meter rate and violation fine increases.

How could that be?

Seemed to Gadfly that, except for one Main St. businessman who spoke at the Sept. 20 public meeting, the opinions of such major stakeholders were absent from the conversation. And you know Gadfly is alllll about good conversation from all perspectives on an issue.

Good conversation builds community! Rah! Rah!

At the Oct. 10 Public Safety meeting (see post #36), we learned that the Board of the Downtown Business Association (3 people?)

“acknowledged” the BPA proposals but did not take a position on them. All very strange to this new observer of City affairs.

But we also learned in a surprising coda to the Oct. 10 meeting that Councilwoman Van Wirt made up and delivered a “generic survey” to 70 small businesses. She received a remarkably high number of returns, 30, and among important things she learned, she said, was that many did not know about the proposed increases and many were completely against them. “We are not reaching out to people affected,” she told us. Gadfly was happily apoplectic at Van Wirt’s revelation and had to ask for more information.

Linked, then, you will find Councilwoman Van Wirt’s “Bethlehem Small Business-Owner Parking Survey.” [Paige survey](#)

Here’s how she described the process:

This is the survey I created for North and South Bethlehem Businesses. I handed this survey, along with a self-addressed stamped envelope, to the owner or manager who was on duty. My sister Allison, my daughter Beatrice, and I did all of Main Street and up the first block of Broad on one Saturday, and the next Saturday I did all of 3rd Street from Cutters Bikes down to the Fahy Bridge. I tried to be very neutral in my approach as I did not want to skew the results. However, if the store owner/manager asked how I felt after introducing the topic, I did tell them my concerns. Many of the verbal concerns as I was dropping

off the survey were the lack of cheap parking for their employee — I think there were a lot of managers on duty rather than owners, managers see the problems differently than an owner. That's why I wanted a mail-in survey — to get the owners to weigh in. I also was trying to get people ENGAGED. Be a part of the voices on this issue. I was surprised at how many answered the survey, but I was even more surprised at how few people showed up at the public meeting, given the fairly energetic responses I received. I was also shocked to learn that really none of the downtown businesses appeared to be aware of the increase itself.

Gadfly hungers to hear the voices of these merchants, but as you can see by Van Wirt's introduction to the survey, the responses are confidential. But high-fives to Van Wirt for putting her boots and her ears on the ground in our downtowns!