

The Bethlehem conversations on defunding the police (3): Jon and Lawrence

The Bethlehem Gadfly Police August 17, 2020

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

*Good conversation builds community.
The Gadfly*

Jon Irons

I have three takeaways. . . . I really appreciate all the questions that came from Council members tonight. . . . I see there's a willingness to take your responsibility seriously of overseeing what is a department of the city of Bethlehem and not a special hallowed organization that needs to be held above other people. . . . My second thought is that I was really disappointed with the answers that you received. . . . I for one am in support of the 8 to Abolition campaign to re-imagine what Public Safety looks like . . . and I have a vision of that that includes much, much less police if not no police, and I understand that that is an intense point of view, and I understand that it's not an all or nothing point of view but that there have to be steps in that direction. But the answers shrunk my faith in the police department. As an Hispanic male, the answers that were given about the disparities in the use of force were wholly inadequate. . . . You're investing somewhere around 20% of your budget in this department, and if they can't ask simple questions like that . . . consider whether this is an investment working for the city and the people. And the last thing that I kinda picked up on is in talking about the Community Engagement Initiative. It sounds like there's a lot of healthy infrastructure and caring infrastructure . . . It's all there, and I'd really like to see those aspects of our community lifted up, and if our investment in the police is not paying off, and if it's just growing year by year and not producing any accountable results, then let's look at the programs that are, let's look at the programs that are helping people with their mental health struggles . . . let's look at our schools. . . . There's a lot that this community needs to offer, and I think unfortunately one of the biggest impediments is the large amount of money that is earmarked very year straight to the police department with, in my view, very little accountability. . . . I feel that there's been a lot of listening already going

on. This didn't start with George Floyd . . . decades, almost a century . . . This is not new. . . . My hope for the Initiative is that it's coming from a Council ready for change.

Lawrence Mayo

I am not a resident, but I am a former police officer in the city. . . . There has been a lot of concern about last month's demonstrators who called for abolishing and defunding the City's police department. So I was very happy to hear from Councilman Colon that we will not be doing this tonight. . . . The City of Bethlehem has invested in this department over the years, and I think that the return on this investment . . . has yielded for the City has been exceptionally good. Over the past 10 years Bethlehem Police officers have definitely saved hundreds of lives, probably many more. These officers have done so not only from stopping violent crimes in progress, but also by administering life-saving . . . to overdose victims, performing CPR when they arrive on the scene before EMS, deploying automatic defibrillators, and other actions. They have taken hundreds of drunk drivers off the road, seized large quantities of deadly heroin and deadly fentanyl, and other drugs. They have eradicated and contained entire criminal organizations, and they have seized illegal guns. They have returned probably hundreds of missing children to their parents . . . domestic abuse, assault, and homicide. . . . Bethlehem's violent crime rate is significantly lower than the national average. . . . Top 10 safest cities of its size in the United States. This is not a broken police department as one or two of the other commenters mentioned. A broken organization does not save hundreds of lives over the course of ten years. . . . The city of Bethlehem has indeed made a wise and profitable investment. . . . This investment has yielded not only safety but prosperity in terms of business development and residential development. . . . Exactly 9 years ago today I responded to an assist call and arrived to see officer Robert Lasso being taken onto an ambulance with a mortal wound from a shotgun. . . . [Officers] are heavily invested in your city as well.