

# Let's start thinking about a "Community Engagement Initiative"

The Bethlehem Gadfly Community Engagement Initiative, George Floyd killing, Police June 12, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on the George Floyd killing* 

We're in the process of thinking about the **Use of Force Directives and a Community Engagement Initiative** memo to Chief DiLuzio by Councilmembers Reynolds and Crampsie Smith.

And once more a tip o' the hat to the Councilors for stepping up and getting something on the table.

We've spent some time thinking about the first part of the memo, the "Use of Force Directives." Now to the "Community Engagement Initiative."



Here's what the Councilors put on the table:

Over the last several years during budget hearings and various community events, we have heard consistently about the positive programs that our police officers engage in with the community. These "community policing" programs involve everything from working with elementary school students to attending block watch meetings where citizens share the issues in their individual neighborhoods. The importance of these programs is unquestioned. They provide positive, trust-building opportunities for members of our community and the police officers who serve them. Yet, many residents feel that the level of trust is still lacking. We, as a community, clearly need to invest more time and money into the aforementioned initiatives to continue to build trust and collaboration between our citizens and our police department.

**We are proposing creating a citywide Community Engagement Initiative within our police department. It would include a broad coalition consisting of residents, police officers, representatives from our schools, social justice organizations, and more.**

The initiative would bring awareness and a louder voice to issues of injustice in our City. It could also help to design and promote events and actions designed to build trust between our citizens and the Police Department. It could also be a place for people to talk, organize, and, most importantly, listen. The reality is we don't know exactly what the coalition would want to focus on. It is designed to be a group with an organic and flexible focus determined by our community. We understand that we are currently successfully carrying out individual events that fulfill the philosophy of engaging citizens with our Police Department in non-enforcement activities. It is clear, however, that we need to do more. Bethlehem needs to include more officers, more organizations, more citizens, and have more discussion on issues relating to race, justice, and trust.

Now Gadfly has said earlier that he didn't think the Chief would have any qualms about engaging with the Councilors on the directive part of their memo. His comments at last week's Council meeting show that the Chief is confident in the area of policies and training in regard to the use of violence.

But Gadfly is not sure how the Chief will respond to this initiative.

The concept of a Community Engagement Initiative is defined only in very, very broad outlines here.

An awfully lot has to be worked out and detailed before one could agree to be totally on board.

Now perhaps there is some back and forth going on between the Chief and the Councilmembers before the requested Monday response on some of these details.

But if Gadfly were Chief, he thinks all he could say now is that 1) he is open (or not) to participating actively in the development of this major enterprise or 2) that he would like to withhold comment and commitment till the Councilors provided much more detail on how such an initiative would operate or 3) here's another, maybe better idea to achieve the same goals.

But a ball is rolling.

Some questions and comments about this initiative are coming into Gadfly's mind — how about you? Think on this, send comments if you want, and join with Gadfly in sharing some preliminary thoughts in the next post.