

Council Candidates – 4-year seat – Prompt 6 (36)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Candidates for election, Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues May 5, 2019

(36th in a series of posts on candidates for election)

BCDC is hosting a candidates' forum May 6, 6PM,

at Steelworkers Hall,

53 E. Lehigh St.

Election Day is May 21

5 candidates

(one not represented here)

vote for 3

6th in the series of candidate statements

statements in alphabetical order this time

*Candidates are invited to alert the Gadfly about where they are
appearing*

Prompt #6, 1 & 2

1) Climate change

There is an urgency among Gadfly followers over the destructive forces of climate change. Other cities have legislated as part of their planning codes mandatory “green” initiatives such as green roofs where feasible. What changes in the existing City of Bethlehem zoning, planning, building codes, etc. are you willing to propose and support to more effectively battle climate change on a local level?

Michael Colon (incumbent)

First let me start by acknowledging the fact climate change is real and the result of human activity. Second, I will be the first to admit I am not the first voice one should listen to when it comes to local environmental policy. My education, professional background, and campaign platforms would confirm such. Rather than google and repeat initiatives I can look up from around the country I would listen to professionals we have from within City Hall and the community (shout out to the EAC who has been working very hard). There are seven members of City Council, if all seven rolled out their own set of ordinances related to one issue it could lead to a legislative logjam. I am more than happy to listen to the ideas of others and see how they can apply to Bethlehem. The times are changing and in the very near future I can see all forward thinking municipalities addressing climate change the best way they see fit to handle the issue.

What am I willing to support? Any ordinance we fully understand and have the capacity to enforce. Sometimes legislation requires compromise and digging into the nuance of proposals. I imagine most if not all candidates agree that climate change needs to be addressed but like other proposals, such as wage equality and government ethics, sometimes the devil is in the details. Rather than claim ownership of any one idea I'd rather listen to the good ideas of others and figure out how we can move forward as a legislative body to combat climate change locally.

J. William Reynolds (incumbent)

When I proposed Bethlehem's first Climate Action Plan, I did so because I realized how

important creating a sustainable Bethlehem was to the citizens of our city. Bethlehem needed to become a more sustainable city and we needed a permanent structure of citizens and environmental organizations ready to implement our Climate Action Plan's recommendations into the future. Our Climate Action Plan is in the process of becoming expansive in scope and depth. Internal municipal reduction goals, citywide energy reduction goals, alternative energy investment strategies, and short and long-term potential policy recommendations will all be included. Adjusting and changing planning and building codes will certainly be included in that discussion.

Several years ago, I investigated the potential to mandate new construction (over a certain amount of square feet) be Leaders in Engineering and Environmental Design (LEED) certified. I discovered the Pennsylvania State Uniform Construction Code (UCC) prohibited certain mandates as it pertains to building codes. What other municipalities have done, however, is offer certain "bonuses" if a project is LEED (or equivalent) certification. Some of these bonuses, however,

that building developers are looking for can become controversial (such as an increase in the allowable density of the project). It becomes an in-depth, nuanced conversation between Administration staff and developers about the inclusion of green initiatives.

So what can we do? When it comes to important projects in the city, the City Administration can absolutely hold out their support for projects that don't fit our vision of what a sustainable community can be. Administration support at Planning and Zoning hearings for example is often vital in determining the success or failure of a project. So it might not be a conversation of "mandating" as much as "How do we use the planning structures we have to get the best projects for the city?"

David Saltzer

The City of Bethlehem developed the Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) to work with city council and to develop a Climate Action Plan (CAP). Some of the plan has been committed to already and the 2018-2019 Climate Action Plan has been divided into Phase 1 and Phase 2 as outlined by the EAC and current city council. The EAC has done an outstanding job presenting at council meetings as well as the Martin Tower "information plan" held 2 weeks ago. If elected, I would continue the work on what the current city council and EAC have framed out and continue to work with the EAC, who has a very good understanding of environmental impact and a very educated committee to advise the members of council on the directions that we need to go in. As for changing ordinances, codes, and zoning, they would have to be dealt with as the findings are presented to council, and the committees meet to discuss what benefits the city could have or what could cause harm to the city. If you are interested in reading the CAP or learning more about the EAC please visit this link <http://bethlehem-pa.gov/about/authorities/eac/index.html>

Paige Van Wirt (incumbent)

The City of Bethlehem is far behind similar-sized progressive cities in terms of addressing environmental concerns. Recently, the Bethlehem Environmental Advisory Council has been an active voice in proposals to both reduce carbon emissions in the city and reduce our downstream waste. This Council backs their advice with facts, and, using their data, in conjunction with experiences in other cities, I feel the City of Bethlehem can make some major inroads on both fronts.

1) solar panels on new builds. I would be in support of a proposal to pilot a solar project on new warehouse construction in Bethlehem. Should the pilot succeed, consideration should be given to expanding solar to all new builds over a certain square footage, where appropriate.

2) The EAC has proposed a plastic bag ban in the City. Eliminating this major source of waste to our local and global ecosystem makes sense. I would study how other cities of our size have implemented such a ban, and understand pitfalls and success stories, and apply them to Bethlehem.

3) The city's fleet should be changed over to electric where feasible, and our maintenance shop brought along, in order to service these vehicles. The EAC studied the costs to the city of a switch in Parking Authority Jeeps over to Chevy Volts and the costs were par.

Whenever changes such as these are proposed, there are plenty of people who will react "yes, but the cost of doing this is X!" What is not taken into consideration in this answer is the cost of NOT addressing our impact on the environment. The more behind we get, the harder it is to catch up.

2) Development

Development is a major source of tension and controversy among Gadfly followers, many of whom are professionally knowledgeable, interested in preserving the historical nature of the City, and disturbed by poor and subjective decisions. What is your view of recent and current development projects in Bethlehem? Possible foci include the rapid neighborhood change in South Bethlehem, the Martin Tower site, the need for affordable housing, the role played by City Administration, the role played by Council, the role of citizen input, adherence to Historical District codes.

Michael Colon (incumbent)

During my first term on City Council I've been in both the majority (S. New Street development) and minority (2 W. Market) of votes which

drew a lot of attention regarding the use of land. A few thoughts I have: First, is that Bethlehem is doing a lot right. Looking at South Bethlehem one can note the stock house turned visitor center, the preservation of the steel stacks, the opening of the Hoover-Mason Trestle, The Factory which completely repurposed an abandoned building to house an innovative business incubator, and the use of another old Steel building to open The National Museum of Industrial History. All those projects are within a few blocks of each other. I also recognize new developments and the preservation of the historical nature of the city is a delicate balance. If everything is new construction than where has our history gone? If we don't want to demolish anything in the City then how to we adapt to changing needs and expansion? Those questions are the complete opposite ends of the spectrum and I think the reality is somewhere in the middle. As I mentioned earlier I did support the S. New Street project which I feel will be beneficial to the neighborhood but have recognized concerns of those against it. At the same time we voted on that project I also stated that I couldn't support a project such as a 9+ story building now or in the future due to its scale. We all have different opinions about where we find that balance but is important to recognize balance is needed as we continue to grow as a city. In regards to Martin Tower I ask myself where else in the City do we have 53 acres ready now for redevelopment? The previous City Council passed a new zoning ordinance for the tract after many meeting and hours of public input. I think we need to ask what are the current needs of the City and how to encourage the best use of this parcel to meet those needs. Affordable housing is a real problem in the City and many people are simply priced out by some of the new apartments going up. During the NAACP candidates forum Councilwoman Van Wirt alluded to a provision in the City's zoning ordinance aimed to address the issue and I think the City administration, Council, and those investing their money in these projects should continue the conversation on how to meet the housing demands of all income levels.

J. William Reynolds (incumbent)

Over the past 20 years, Bethlehem has recovered from the decline of Bethlehem Steel

because of the impressive economic redevelopment and revitalization that our community continues to experience. We are a city with an economy that is growing rapidly from year to year and with that growth has come thousands of new jobs for our citizens. We cannot become hostile to development if we want to continue to be a financially thriving city that produces enough tax revenue to pay our hard working employees who keep our streets safe and deliver our basic city services.

With that being said, the real question is “How do we create the BEST development

projects for our City?” By structure, the City Administration, with the full time professional staff, has the responsibility to carry a substantial portion of the burden in asking and answering (privately and publicly) the questions/concerns that arise in our community, from our citizens, and City Council. Above all else, the City Administration must effectively relay THEIR process and involvement in major development projects. What did they push for internally? What couldn't they push for? Why has the process played out the way it has?

The world of development is not simple. Projects often need some approvals, don't need other approvals, don't come up for any City Council votes, etc. Government also does not, despite our wishes at certain points, have the ability to control every aspect of what someone does with their private property. It is a balancing act. I have supported Administrations who I feel have carried out their mission effectively in getting the best possible project for our community and I have taken Administrations to task for failing to live up to that responsibility.

As we move forward with more development in the coming years, it is imperative that we as a community continue to ask and push for the best possible development projects while also realizing that economic revitalization and redevelopment will continue to be vital to the future of our city.

David Saltzer

I am about keeping our history while continuing to attract business that will provide jobs that provide a decent living wage and benefits, thus allowing those same people to go out and reinvest in the city by dining and visiting attractions. A lot of the new construction is very bland, and I feel that we are losing some of the “historic charm” with big square box buildings that do not fit in with the current infrastructure of the neighborhoods.

I recently spoke at the NAACP forum and said there that we are pushing out the low to middle class people that live and love this city but continuing to build upscale lofts and apartments that the everyday worker cannot afford—at the same time, if local folks CAN afford it, then they are not going out to patronize the local business because they just simply cannot afford to do both. This has a trickle-down affect and now the store/business owner is not able to prosper either. We need to get back to some middle-class mentality and build affordable housing that working people can afford—again attracting quality jobs to the city can help with this.

In regard to the Martin Tower project, I was at the meeting and was very disappointed on several fronts: with the presentation, as well as the timing and the fact that it was only advertised a few hours before, and lastly that advertisements said there would not be a vote, and there was a vote. Many residents spoke and made excellent comments and points. We have the opportunity to do something great here and it seems as if

average is what the developer is presenting. We are the City of Bethlehem and we deserve/demand excellence, not average. This project could bring so much to the city if properly thought out. Attendees' concerns are the mixed use, not creating a third downtown, the impact Nitschmann and Liberty schools, walkability, green space, contamination to Burnside, as well as the creek and walking paths, all of which were talked about but none of which had clear answers, or answers that were believable.

We have a historical committee for a reason, to keep the history of this city, and their value is and should be important in the consideration of any big changes to the city. As for council and administration, there needs to be a better working relationship and more communication. As for residents in the city, they are passionate, smart, and most have been here for a long time. Their concerns should be heard and listened to and should be treated with respect and dignity.

Paige Van Wirt (incumbent)

The tension that exists now between our historic character and development is not whether we develop or not but how to we ensure that our character is maintained while we welcome new development. I used an analogy in a previous council meeting: nobody wants to to drive in a city where certain people get to run the red lights. This has happened as we allow development that builds first and then comes back later and asks for forgiveness for breaking the rules. Rules, such as zoning, historic commission guidelines, and our comprehensive plan are standards that create the shape and character of our city. If a few people are allowed to run through red lights, it makes everyone who who would otherwise develop here, go elsewhere. Investors do not like shaky foundations. City Council is the representative body for the citizens. It is up to Council to ensure that our standards are applied consistently and evenly to all

projects, so that Bethlehem retains its historic character while at the same time welcoming development that is appropriate in scale and context. Cities are dynamic, ever-evolving entities. Council must ensure that the direction this city takes is one that directly benefits the citizens, maintains our singular historic character, and creates a joyful place for all people to live.



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