Key moments in the reappointment discussion (2)

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government February 14, 2020

Latest in a series of posts on City Government

Gadfly would like to go back to the significant thread from the February 4 Council meeting he was pursuing relating to Council's important responsibility to approve appointments to the City Authorities, Boards, and Commissions (the ABCs).

Last Monday we focused on the dramatically contrasting views of Councilwoman Van Wirt and Councilman Callahan on the general role of Council in the approval process — Councilwoman Van Wirt arguing for close Council oversight of appointments and for citizen advocates as ABC members, Councilman Callahan arguing for acquiescing to the Mayor's appointments except in exceptional circumstances.

This focus in their interaction regarding an appointment to the Bethlehem Authority was general, big picture. Later, in regard to the appointment to the Parking Authority, however, the focus was much narrower. Here according to Councilwoman Van Wirt was a specific ABC that was not functioning properly, not functioning openly in the best interest of the City, and visibly in need of the citizen advocate kind of representation that she advocated in her previous comments.

Councilwoman Van Wirt's specific example was the August 28, 2019, meeting of the Parking Authority Board to approve the retail and residential element of the Polk Street garage. The BPA had asked the City to evaluate design proposals, an ad hoc city committee was appointed, and that committee reported in favor of one of the proposals. At the August 28 meeting the Board — with City ad hoc committee members present but unheard from and even unacknowledged — went into its two-minute drill (it actually "scored" in 1:50 according to time-keeper Gadfly's precision calculation) and accepted the other proposal. Gadfly found the action rather outrageous and refers you to his "just had to get this off his chest" post in which he prints a statement he made before the Board at their September 25 meeting.

It's a beaut.

https://youtu.be/JwbFmotzl1A

- The Parking Authority has a huge public perception problem.
- The time has come for a community advocate to be appointed to the Parking Authority.
- I would like to see somebody from the Southside even appointed to the Parking Authority.
- There was nobody there [the vote on Polk Street mentioned above] who was listening to what the committee had to say.
- This exemplifies exactly why I'm pushing and Olga's pushing for community representation on that Board.
- No discussion happened.
- At least have a vigorous, informed discussion.
- Nobody on that Board stuck up their hand and said anything.
- It is not about [the nominee] personally, it is about the fact that the Board does not represent the needs of the citizens of Bethlehem.
- It's time to have new people on there.
- There isn't anybody putting their hand up and saying what about what's best for the City and the citizens of Bethlehem.

Councilwoman Van Wirt was followed by Councilwoman Crampsie Smith, the newest member of Council. Laudably, recognizing the sensitivity of this appointment to this ABC, Councilwoman Crampsie Smith took initiative and talked with the nominee before the meeting. She was satisfied with her conversation and indicated she would vote for the nominee based on his reputation for integrity (well founded) and because of his experience on the Board with the Polk Street Garage development still in the works.

https://youtu.be/lwg9Ql-WhCY

Gadfly applauds Councilwoman Crampsie Smith for making personal contact with the nominee, but the flaw in her reasoning that he sees is that there is no evidence of the nominee's experience with, involvement with the deliberations on the Polk Street Garage. On what evidence of the

nominee's tenure on the Board besides attendance records did the Councilwoman have on which to base her judgment?

The answer is none. None was provided to her.

This has been Gadfly's point.

Board members may be present at meetings, but you need to scratch hard to find any contributions they make. There is little or no visible indication of their thinking about, of their understanding of issues.

That's why Gadfly has been asking for evidence based on performance when reappointments occur.

Without such evidence, it is not reasonable to assume that just because the nominee was "there" then that he will be valuable now and in the future.

Gadfly has been thinking a lot about this. He would like to say clearly with the Council people that he is not impugning the integrity of the reappointment nominees. They are good people. In the case of the Parking Authority, however, with which Gadfly is most familiar, Gadfly wonders if the "fault" is in the administrative style. Gadfly doesn't sense that some Board members are invited to play significant roles. From Gadfly's experience, there is not much discussion of issues, and decisions and directions seemed to be already decided and brought to the Board simply for a ratification vote.

There is voting but not discussion.

Gadfly's been wondering if a different dynamic in the leadership of the Board would be beneficial.

to be continued . . .