

# Funding the Bethlehem Food Co-Op: “There’s not a project more important in the City of Bethlehem than the Bethlehem Food Co-Op”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Bethlehem Food Co-Op, City government, Co-Op, Bethlehem Food, Serious Issues November 1, 2019

 *The latest in a series of posts on City government* 

## Bethlehem Food Co-Op

We’re following the argument against funding the Bethlehem Food Co-Op \$105,000 with funds from the Housing and Urban Development CDBG program administered by the City of Bethlehem.

Remember that though all the proposed CDBG allocations were approved by the Community Development committee last Monday, the “package” will still have to be approved by full Council.

Councilman Reynolds forcefully countered the questions raised and the positions taken against funding BFC that we presented in the last post in this series.

Let’s look at how he did that.

<https://youtu.be/4DgEER4KogA>

- There’s not a project more important in the City of Bethlehem than the Bethlehem Food Co-Op.
- The Co-Op is providing something to this City . . . through not just the organization and the services that are being provided at

William Penn Elementary School and Thomas Jefferson Elementary School, but there's also a spirit — how do we create things that benefit every single person in the City of Bethlehem.

- People look at it as being about food security and about shopping and to be able to make your own choice, but it is much more than that — it is about how you create a sustainable city.
- I hear the stories of the kids who walk home past Allen High School, and I don't blame them when they are going to McDonald's or they're going to Burger King, because they are the only food options that they have around.
- This is an issue of equity, it's an issue of social justice, it is an environmental issue.
- When you look at the growth that has occurred, it is growth that has occurred by spreading the idea of the Co-Op without even having a location that is announced yet.
- And it is that idea and that spirit that we can create a third place for people, a place where people don't just go to work and where they live but it brings the community together, and we don't have a lot of those in this city.
- What we do have in this city is private businesses that look for tax incentives.
- There is not a vote that I am prouder of than I am to vote for the Co-Op because of what it represents for the future of this city.
- It has not been an easy path to get to this point of 660 members.
- This is what it means to be part of a community.
- This is how you put together real change in a community.
- It is an example of what our city can be when we look at what we can accomplish when we come together.
- I'll bet that if there was an idea that there would be even one comment about the Co-Op [tonight] that we could have gotten all 660 households to come to this particular meeting to talk about what [BFC] means to this community.

- In a day and age where a lot of people think that the government doesn't stand up for these kinds of projects and these types of missions. [the support from all areas] is a real testament to what this community can be and what people are able to accomplish when they come together for a mission that goes beyond their own self-interest.

BFC could not have a more vigorous defender on Council than JWR.

He is a powerful speaker, a spellbinder, in fact, and he was totally engaged, totally in high gear.

“There's not a project more important in the City of Bethlehem than the Bethlehem Food Co-Op,” he asserted — but that's a claim that even this BFC supporter felt a bit of a stretch.

“There is not a vote that I am prouder of than I am to vote for the Co-Op because of what it represents for the future of this city,” he asserted — but, again, that's a claim that even this BFC supporter felt a bit of a stretch.

Frankly, Gadfly felt JWR overdid with such statements in BFC's defense.

Doffing his BFC cap for a time and donning his professorial robe, Gadfly was looking for reasonable arguments from JWR specifically aimed at Haines's reasonable arguments.

For BFC isn't a non-profit, and it would be in competition with other food stores, and when Gadfly canvassed the City for his collage of yard signs, he wasn't finding them in low and moderate income areas.

So one question is how is BFC meeting the federal guidelines?

Apparently the BFC is doing some program with William Penn and Thomas Jefferson. That's the kind of down-to-earth detail nerdy Gadfly

was looking for from JWR (or somebody) to show that BFC complied with CDBG guidelines of tending to the welfare of low and moderate income folk.

Instead, Gadfly felt JWR's emphasis on BFC as a well structured, unique program populated by a fiery, loyal, ever-growing membership that, tapping the power of community (Gadfly's aphrodisiac word!), is a model for social change and progress was, while true, somewhat off-point.

Ok, BFCers are great people (hey, I'm one of them!) running a great program.

But how does the BFC specifically meet the bureaucratic guideline in regard to low and moderate income families that enables it to receive taxpayer dollars?

And how does the BFC answer the objection that it will operate in the free market enjoying the advantage of a not-so-hidden-hand helping it along.

Gadfly feels that JWR's enthusiastic superlatives — with which, remember, Gadfly agrees! — still miss the point of the reasonable objections raised.

Ha! Gadfly, you say, if you are on the side of the BFC, why don't you just shut up!

Gadfly is such a complicated person.

He's starting to feel like the Benedict Arnold of the co-op world.

But he likes to make sure things are done by the book.

The next post helps in that respect.

