

Gadfly with questions for the police department

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police July 7, 2020

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

Gadfly understood there was to be a Public Safety Committee meeting to discuss the two prongs of the Reynolds/Crampsie Smith memo to the Mayor: the use of force directives and a Community Engagement Initiative.

He is not sure of the status of that Public Safety Committee meeting now that a resolution on the CEI is to be voted on tonight.

But he was hoping for this meeting as an opportunity to learn more about and to think more about our Police Department during this time of national conversation about how police departments are structured. In fact, he was hoping for the kind of invitation for the public to ask questions beforehand — like was done by the Mayor for the online coronavirus sessions — that would then be answered at the meeting.

What questions would you want to ask? What are the kinds of things you'd like to know about our Police Department now that we and many others around the country are putting these departments under some scrutiny?

Gadfly shotguns here some things he would like to know.

History: Gadfly's a historian, and he'd like a little history to frame the present discussion. There is an interesting **“Department History”** section on the City web site. But Gadfly is thinking of something different. What have been the past “philosophies” of the department? What type, what brand of policing characterized the department under, say, the chiefs before Chief DiLuzio? Go back 3-4 chiefs: Schiffer, Bedics, Miller, Donchez, etc. What philosophies were in play? Was there any change with Chief DiLuzio? How did the department get where it is now? Why is the department doing what it does now?

Community policing: Gadfly is confused. The Department describes itself now as following a Community Policing philosophy. When and why

did that occur? But he has heard resident Lisa Rosa in particular at City Council meetings bemoan the loss of community policing. And just recently in the post-GeorgeFloyd conversations others have called for a return to community policing. Which is it? Do we have it or not? Or are there different forms of community policing? What is the definition of community policing anyway? What other kinds of policing are there? How does community policing differ from them?

Citizen complaints/officer discipline: There is an **“Issue with an Officer”** page on the City web site that speaks of an “Employee Misconduct Allegation form” that can be filled out at headquarters. (Let’s not forget that there is a **“Commend an Officer”** page as well that we hope gets a lot of action.) Shouldn’t this “Issue” page be online rather than requiring perhaps awkward and perhaps intimidating interaction with an officer downstairs at City Hall? Let’s go back, say, 5 years — how many issues have there been each year? Are the issues coded or classified by type so that we can better understand their nature? If so, what are they? Are there categories for improper use of force, profiling, disrespect, intimidation, etc.? How and by whom are these complaints handled — the Chief? the Standards division? What are the outcomes (guilty/not guilty, warning, a lecture, letter in the file, disciplinary action, dismissal) and give statistics over the past 5 years? How many of the current officer force have had a citizen complaint? How many have had multiple complaints? How many complaints have the top 5 officers in number of complaints had? What role does the FOP have in investigation of the complaints? Has the Department fired or tried to fire an officer for such complaints? What role does the FOP play in a firing? What is the process to fire an officer? We could use a case study of handling a complaint — what happened in **this case** that was reported to Gadfly? Give 2-3 other examples of how complaints were resolved. Are complainants made aware of the disposition of their complaints?

Racial composition of the department: If Gadfly remembers correctly, he has heard the Chief recently say that the department is racially mixed, even one Asian if memory serves. But what are the exact numbers? How many white, how many latino, etc? Does the racial composition of the force mirror the racial composition of the City? How many minority officers are in leadership positions?

Cameras: body cameras came in 2019, and, if Gadfly memory serves again, he heard the Chief say recently that every officer has one. However, what are the rules for use? Gadfly has heard of two cases settled definitively by camera evidence. Was there camera evidence in the **case above**? Have the cameras changed officer behavior? Is there any evidence that the use of body cameras has changed the number and kind of citizen complaints?

Handcuffing: Gadfly, no doubt naively, has always been curious about this. What is the policy on handcuffing? Gadfly is thinking of the Rayshard Brooks case recently where the interaction of Brooks and the officer seemed fine until the cuffing. Cuffing is both humiliating and emasculating. Lack of control. Resistance is natural. None of us would like it. Especially if feeling innocent of wrongdoing or if the offense or suspected offense is minor. Must handcuffing be done for every arrest? (We've seen very young kids in cuffs.)

Citizen rights: Ha! Maybe the police are not the ones to ask this question of. But Gadfly has often heard the advice to just go along with an officer, not to question, not to resist, even if you know you have done nothing wrong. And that's probably what he would do. But what *can* you do? What "resistance" is allowable? Do you have a right to know what you are being arrested for? What happens if you deny a request to search your car? Gadfly is thinking that information on allowable citizen behavior and what citizen rights are when detained or arrested would be good, perhaps through role playing of example situations .

Police response: We heard recently that the City is divided up into 8 sectors. And we heard that the area around 6th and Hayes is in the worst crime area in the city. Gadfly would like to see the ranking of those 8 areas. But what is the department response to a high crime area? Is the response to station more manpower there? More heavily armed manpower? To exercise more surveillance? To implement more force? Or is there any attempt to understand the reasons/causes for that high crime and to establish programs or to work with other departments in the city to establish programs that might hack away at the root of the problem? What specific policies has the department implemented to stem crime in the past several years in the top two crime areas in the city and have those plans been successful. Show data.

Past CEI-type activities: There was a CEI-type event in 2016 with the local NAACP called “**Black Lives Also Matter.**” The newspaper said troublesome stories reported by residents “all came as news” to Chief DiLuzio, “but he agreed police training hasn’t kept up with the times, noting a recruit goes through 600 hours at the academy compared to the 1,500 hours it takes to become a cosmetologist. Raised on technology, a new officer might come on duty lacking the interpersonal skills, the ability to read body language that the job requires, he said. . . . ‘All this technology, great: Get the new iPhone 974, great, whatever it’s up to now. But it can’t replace a human,’ DiLuzio said. ‘The training is, I don’t think, up to snuff for 2016. I’ll probably get criticized for it. I’m in this job for 36 years. I have a right to say it.’” Were there any changes instituted as a result of this forum? Was there any follow-up contact with the NAACP to determine the outcome of the forum? The Mayor is quoted as saying this was the “fourth such forum on race relations,” but Gadfly hasn’t been able to find info on the others. What prompted the Mayor to institute this series, if it was he who did it? What can we learn from the success or failure of this forum (or series of forums) that bears on the one being proposed now? Were there other such CEI-type activities in recent memory that we also should know about as we contemplate a new one now? In other words and simply, do CEI’s do any good?

Educating the public: Here’s a wild idea. Looking at use of force directives is one thing. Seeing them in concrete situations another. Gadfly imagines there must be training videos of situations involving police interactions with the public showing right and wrong police behavior. How about the police sharing them with the public? How about educating the public about the police viewpoint in regard to specific situations where force is applied? How about open conversation between police and community members around not just “directives” but “real life” — showing how an officer properly or improperly processes his or her training? For instance, Gadfly posted this “**A Case Study in the use of force by police.**” Gadfly can see a great conversation around that video. As starkly horrible as that video can feel, Gadfly, having just come off reading the use of force directive, thought a case could be made that the officer was acting properly.

Whew! Well, there’s Gadfly’s shotgun blast of questions as the countdown toward posting time has expired.

What are you thinking? What would you like to ask the police?

Remember, good conversation builds community.