

Gadfly mayoral forum #3: city services

The Bethlehem Gadfly Candidates for election, Election, Forum, Gadfly Forum March 29, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts on the Gadfly Forum* 

The Mayoral candidate comparison chart

The candidates again have wonderfully cooperated with what they might think of as Bethlehem's form of March madness.

We need to stop, think, and be grateful at what is extraordinary, voluntary cooperation.

The candidate responses are presented in alphabetical order this time.

The prompt:

Dana, Willie:

The first two forums have been on "heady" subjects: the budget and development.

I'd like to get more down to earth for Forum #3.

The Mayor is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the city. The Mayor is on the front line every day, in the trenches. The mayor is responsible for the basic city services from trash pick-up to parking to road paving that produce a good quality of life for our residents. The mayor "administers." I think of him or her as the person who keeps the trains running on time. When basic services break down, the mayor gets the call. The average Bethlehem Joe or Jane no doubt spends less time thinking about the budget and development than whether the snow is shoveled and the leaves picked up.

How do you see yourself in this aspect of a mayor's job?

For instance, here are some possible things to think about that would be of interest to talk about:

1) What kind of administrator do you see yourself as? Do you have a sense of your leadership style? Are you a delegator? Are you “hands-on”? Are you a micromanager? Do you foster creativity? How will you ensure that priorities are set, goals met? How will you interact with department heads? How will you set a tone for city employees in dealing with the public?

2) Do you contemplate any changes in the way “City Hall” operates? Will there be administrative innovation? Will there be new internal policies, procedures? Will there be new work structures, new ways of organizing how things get done? Do you plan creating any new administrative positions, any new reporting channels? Will it be “business as usual” in City Hall when you move in to the corner office, or do you see some changes? For example, I believe fairly recently Recreation was moved around in a reorganization plan. Do you see anything like that as you envision yourself overseeing the nitty-gritty, day-to-day operation of the city?

3) Do you have a sense of what city services are working well and what city services aren’t? For instance, most particularly, are you aware of citizen concerns in certain areas of city services in which you will want to focus your attention right away and strive for improvement? Is there one department on which you will want to focus your attention? How will you monitor resident complaints and concerns and their successful resolution?

Some rich topics there from which to select and focus.

Thank you for your service and willingness to serve.

Dana Grubb

Having worked 27 years in several positions and with regular interaction among all city departments, I am the only Democratic candidate with the background and management experience to run Bethlehem city government. I will hit the ground running with my plans to reorganize,



streamline, and rebuild employee morale so that the residents of Bethlehem get the best services possible and are treated with respect and fairness.

My management style has been characterized as “firm and fair.” I would add compassionate to that because I always try to put myself in the other employee’s shoes. When I worked in city hall, I expected my co-workers to execute their job duties and follow the employment rules and policies. I also sought to encourage them to have an attitude of service to the public, and one of empathy: employees need to consider the way in which they would like an issue handled if it were their own. I showed confidence in bureau heads and those reporting directly to me by enabling them to do their jobs; I also urged them to let me know if they needed support, so we could find solutions together. As Mayor, I may need to be more hands on initially, not to the point of micromanagement, but to ensure that everyone understands my philosophy of working in local government: it’s all about service to the community.

The Continuous Improvement Program under a prior administration failed because of the top-down bullying management style it created. Instead, innovations for cost savings and efficiency will be encouraged organically, and if someone has a good idea, I want to hear about it. I want the city workforce to enjoy coming to work, not be counting down the days until they’ll be leaving public service.

My Mayor’s office will be bi-lingual. There will be both a chief of staff position and a community outreach position. Chief of staff will work closely with me and assist in the dissemination of timely public information among other responsibilities. The community outreach professional will coordinate interaction between my office and outside groups and agencies. Both may be called upon to represent my office if there are scheduling conflicts.

I will also maintain the Mayor’s open office program, although perhaps on a different schedule, including evening hours at locations around the City to make access to the Mayor easier and less intimidating for segments of the population who need that consideration.

I will seek diversity in the hiring of qualified individuals. As much as possible, I will try to find the best and brightest people for city positions who are also city residents. That kind of connection to Bethlehem among city staff is critical, and I want it in my administration.

My plans for reorganization include returning the Department of Sewer and Water back into Public Works, where it used to be. There will be a Public Works Director and a Deputy Director of Sewer and Water in the reconstituted format.

I will reestablish a Department of Parks and Recreation because I think its dissolution was very short-sighted. Our parks, playgrounds, and trails need attention: a reestablished Department will bring a renewed effort to maintenance and potential capital projects. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's the need for outdoor activities to keep ourselves mentally and physically healthy.

I will take community policing one step further than the initial reorganization by Chief Kott. The concept of community policing needs to become ingrained among the patrol platoons. I will promote and encourage this so we can build stronger relationships, communication, and trust between law enforcement and the public.

There are several positions inside city hall that will either be cut or refocused. A number of positions have been instituted over the last 15 to 20 years that were created for people and not because of real need.

Unlike my opponent, I am a small business owner. I understand the challenges and mechanics of running a small business, whether existing or start-up. This is why I will create the small business concierge position in the Office of Economic Development, so that a one-stop shop exists to provide resources for both new and existing business owners in Bethlehem.

I also remain committed to transferring the day-to-day operation of the Bethlehem Parking Authority into a City Department of Parking. The physical location will remain the same; however, as a city department, provision of services will be directly responsible to elected officials, which will make it more accountable. The Authority will remain to handle financing and ownership matters, much the same as the current



structure with the water system's Bethlehem Authority and city department.

Finally, delivery of city services is a fundamental responsibility for those serving in city government. I've heard far too many complaints about nonresponses to emails and phone calls from business owners and residents. It doesn't take much to acknowledge a contact and inform someone that you're working on it and will be back in touch with an answer. To simply ignore

something is unacceptable.

The city's workforce is a tremendous asset. I will do everything in my power to restore morale and pride in effort. Out of my own pocket, I plan to institute a monthly employee award in the form of a gift card from a Bethlehem business; I also have a few other ideas to reverse the current downward spiral of morale.

Managing a workforce takes experience: I have that experience. My opponent does not.

J. William Reynolds

The daily running of City Hall revolves around the delivery of basic city services. The efficient delivery of these services is often the determining factor for people when deciding

if they feel local government is working. The City of Bethlehem has a history of delivering services well. Our water is of the highest quality, our leaves get picked up, and our streets are clean. Our employees deserve credit for the reputation Bethlehem has as a well-run city. There are several things, however, that I see Bethlehem needing to do to improve our delivery of services.

On a systemic level, City Hall needs to use technology to improve the efficiency of our operations. City government has taken several steps in recent years that have improved our use of technology. An improved website, a new services app, and our open data portal have contributed to real progress. We need to continue to implement technology, however. I have learned that citizens become the most frustrated when they cannot get an answer to their questions. Technology should allow neighborhood issues to be responded to in a quicker manner. We should also be using data more effectively to track and determine if city services are being delivered effectively as well. If someone sends me an email that they are happy with leaf pick up, that is great. That does not, however, guarantee that the system of leaf pickup is working or that the majority of people are happy. We need citywide data and metrics to determine that. The establishment of such data systems needs to be a priority moving forward.

Connected to this idea of using technology more, there is a lot of room for the City to communicate more effectively with our citizens. Our communications survey in 2019 showed that while residents (who filled out the survey) were largely happy with City communication channels, there were still things that we could do to make City Hall more accessible, clear, and responsive. This is absolutely an issue that must be prioritized going forward. As stated above, we have made great strides in this area, but there is much more we can do to bring City Hall into the 21st century.

It is also important that when citizens walk into City Hall that they feel that city government is being helpful. Often times, people's entire opinion of City Hall will be determined by their one visit every couple of years to file for a permit or inquire about a communication that they received from the City. It is important that when citizens come to City Hall that they leave with the feeling that City Hall is welcoming, understanding, and helpful in trying to solve problems.

During my time on City Council, I have learned City Hall is the most productive when goals and priorities are shared between the Administration and City Council, across departments, and the community. Decision-making can never be done in a vacuum. I have always relied on the leaders of Departments and Bureaus to provide

practical, on the ground information to influence decisions related to funding and allocation of resources. This collaborative approach is one that provides the framework for how a City Hall should be run as we look to create a more accessible and responsive city.

Successful leadership in government often comes down to one question. Are you able to build diverse, broad coalitions to create progress and change? During my time in public office, I have learned rarely does anything of consequence happen without significant support, time, and energy coming from multiple areas of the community. When it comes to the City of Bethlehem, this means a combination of City Hall and community support. During my time as a Councilmember, this has been the formula I have used to create our Climate Action Plan and NorthSide 2027. These types of coalitions – residents, City Hall staff, elected officials, and institutional representatives – will be a hallmark of how my Administration would look to organize efforts to create change and progress in our City.

Residents are welcome to fashion reflections on candidate comments, sending them to ejg1@lehigh.edu. On Gadfly we seek the good conversation that builds community, so please be courteous at all times. Gadfly retains the right to abridge and to edit your reflections and to decline posts that are repetitive or that contain personal attacks. Gadfly will publish resident reflections on the week's Forum at noon on Friday.