

Bethlehem Moment 3: An Aroused City Beats City Hall

The Bethlehem Gadfly Bethlehem Moments, Fun Stuff, Gadfly's posts December 6, 2018

Bethlehem Moment 3

City Council

Dec. 4, 2018

Ed Gallagher 49 W. Greenwich

A Bethlehem Moment: November 4, 1958

They say “Ya can’t beat City Hall.” On November 4, 1958, an “aroused city” of Bethlehem did just that. Forty years after the city’s birth, the Bethlehem Junior Chamber of Commerce mounted a campaign to establish a Charter Commission to study and possibly change our form of local government. Our entrenched Democratic City Council at that time, realizing their power was at stake, vigorously fought this challenge to their existence, smelling the hidden hand of an “ivory towered” newspaper editor; raising the spectre of dictatorship; arguing widespread satisfaction with the status quo; meddling by the Jaycees, who may not even be taxpayers; and voting by Commission members who “might not know the difference between forms of government and a groundhog hole.” That editor, the legendary John Strohmeyer, lashed out at this “flagrant abuse of political power” aimed at perpetuating a “spoils system”; the Jaycees worked the public door-to-door; and in a turnout higher in some sections than the 1956 presidential election, the entire non-partisan Jaycee slate was elected to the Commission. On November 4, 1958, “political novices” tapped the power of democracy, reminded “the machine” where the power ultimately lies, took control of their own destiny, and started a process that gave us our current mayor-council form of government.

For the full story, see the attachment to “Fighting City Hall – and Winning, November 4, 1958” under Bethlehem Moments on The Bethlehem Gadfly, December 2, 2018 (thebethlehemgadfly.com/).