

Again, where are we?

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police July 16, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts responding to the George Floyd killing* 

What's the best way to have this meeting?

Councilman Colon, Chair of the Public Safety Committee

We are temporarily putting the Public Safety Committee meeting on hold

until we can find a work-around

President Waldron

Where are we? Gadfly asked **three days ago**.

About the Public Safety Committee meeting, he means.

The Community Engagement Initiative has been handed off to the City. Apparently it's up to the City to initiate the Initiative.

But what about that Public Safety meeting?

Gadfly feels even more urgency about that meeting after watching and listening to the protestors pounding on walls of the building in which Allentown City Council was at that moment meeting last night.

Council spent almost 20 minutes last meeting July 7 explaining its paralysis.

AUDIO FILES NOT AVAILABLE IN THIS ARCHIVE

Councilman Colon, Chair of the Public Safety Committee (there are technical issues with part of his comments): “It it weren't for COVID-19 and the restrictions it's put on Council . . . we'd have had this meeting already. . . . We're expecting a large crowd, and

I'd like to see a large crowd, but I want to see everybody who wants to attend able to attend. . . . [state guidelines, 250 meeting max] Is it really a public meeting, who gets to control who comes into the meeting? . . . the possibility of a virtual public safety meeting, which I am in support of, but . . . digital divide. . . . I am someone who favors doing things in person. . . . I think the situation is unique, I'm open to feedback from members of Council. . . . I want this accessible to as many members of the community as possible. . . . I don't want this to be something that we're getting in to September. . . . What's the best way to have this meeting and capture the comments by as many members of the community as possible?"

President Waldron: "There's a lot that goes into a public meeting. . . . For something as important as these conversations, I'm hesitant to rely on that infrastructure if we go to another venue and won't be able to guarantee the level of accessibility of folks who are online to listen in or make comment remotely. . . . Our restrictions really that we are hung up on is that 250 number. . . . There's a lot lost in having a remote meeting versus an in-person meeting. . . . Whichever way we came to, people were going to be excluded. . . . We are temporarily putting the Public Safety Committee meeting on hold until we can find a work around. . . . It wasn't safe or prudent to move forward with scheduling a meeting till we had more guidance from the state and the school district and a better vision of COVID-19. . . . By no means are we trying to avoid this meeting."

Understood.

But Gadfly hears the drumbeat of protestor hands pounding on the wall — don't you? Cup your ears and listen.

AUDIO FILES NOT AVAILABLE IN THIS ARCHIVE

And Gadfly worries about the optics. The Public Safety Committee that Councilman Colon chairs did not take up or even comment on the 6th

and Hayes traffic stop at their March 3 meeting. And to tell the truth Gadfly — being admittedly bitchily gadflyish here — has wondered about Chairman Colon’s sense of urgency. He has consistently over the past several meetings said this is a time to listen, to keep the dialog going. But Gadfly remembers feeling oddly struck by his comments at the June 3 Council meeting to the effect that “I truly believe that Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, we’re not going to be the ones to change the world, to change the country. I think we can continue beyond today as we have. Change is incremental . . . change takes time.” Gadfly remembers thinking then, no, that’s not right, we should be thinking that we are the ones to change the world, that we should be seeking to exercise active leadership. That’s what he was looking for his leaders to say. Now is the time for action. Councilman Colon sounded a bit too patient for Gadfly’s likin’.

AUDIO FILES NOT AVAILABLE IN THIS ARCHIVE

Gadfly remembers now **Councilman Reynolds saying**, “It’s about creating real change . . . The structure is designed to create public pressure such as we’ve seen tonight to create change within the city and within our police department . . . I’m trying to create something here that will allow for permanent access for these conversation and actions that need change . . . What I am trying to do here is create a permanent structure that will change the face of that conversation going forward . . . This is an opportunity, an opportunity for all of us to create real change.” Gadfly remembers thinking that the Reynolds leaning forward with urgent tone was more to his liking.

So the optics are bad. President Waldron has said and explained why that Council is not trying to duck a Public Safety meeting. But the optics are bad.

Of course, the next Council meeting is within sight, and maybe the work-around has been found.

Maybe all is good.

But Gadfly will take a shot at a work-around in the next post.