

It's time for some gavel-talk

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government January 18, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on city government* 

City Council's new year begins for real at next Tuesday's meeting.

Adam Waldron begins his second term as Council president for real at next Tuesday's meeting.

The one big criticism of President Waldron expressed strongly both before and after the election on January 6 focused on his gavel.

It's been described as a "soft gavel."

In fact, Gadfly might have originated that description. Way back, Gadfly referred to President Waldron as Mr. Soft Gavel. He meant it in a humorously thankful way for usually allowing loquacious (good SAT word) public commenters (like himself) a bit of leeway with the 5-minute rule.

But not everybody is happy with President Waldron's soft gavel and, indeed — you can't deny — there have been problems surrounding its use.

President Waldron's gavel is a legitimate subject of controversy.

President Waldron realizes that his gavel style/philosophy has been seen by some as problematic. He has not hidden from the criticism. Admirably, President Waldron has made at least three extended statements about/defenses of it during his first term. And, in fact, it was the substance of his pre-election "stump speech" on January 6, where he acknowledges that he has been criticized for allowing people "to speak

too much” but that he believes that “more conversation . . . is always a good thing” and that “everyone should have an opportunity to be heard.”

<https://youtu.be/sQAIBpEEkAU>

President Waldron is personally committed to his gavel style and relates in the stump speech that individual conversations with his Council colleagues have not given him reasons to change.

President Waldron will continue to apply a soft gavel.

Which means that some Gadfly followers will continue to be dissatisfied and that some problems may occur.

Ugh.

So let’s talk about this gavel issue. Gadfly, you know, believes that “good conversation builds community.”

Listen to Gadfly #1 Stephen Antalics on the subject of freedom of speech within the rotundity of Town Hall, speaking just after bequeathing President Waldron that most Christmassy of all Christmas sweaters he’s wearing.

<https://youtu.be/YW35CcqY1OE>

Gadfly #1 gives us a structure with which to talk about the gavel issue. Following classic rhetorical practice, he “divides” the subject into free speech for the 1) audience and 2) the Head Table, then further subdividing 2) into 2a) objective speech and 2b) subjective speech.

Useful divisions.

So let’s think first about how President Waldron uses his gavel with the audience during public comment.

to be continued . . .