

Pilot program connecting police with a social worker

The Bethlehem Gadfly Police November 3, 2020

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

Committee of the Whole meeting, October 29, 2020

[Meeting documents here](#)

[view meeting here](#)

*“We’re not talking about things, it seems to me, that really matter.”
The Gadfly*

ref: **“I didn’t hear anything that I wanted to hear or anything that I felt I needed to hear”**

ref: **audio clip: Gadfly comment at Committee of the Whole October 22**

ref: **“Gadfly suggests a ‘first contact’ focus”**

ref: **“Maybe a meeting on ‘first contact’ situations”**

Ok, so the city and the council are not doing what Gadfly wants.

So what is the City doing?

The Mayor indicates the City has “learned from reflection” and is engaging in “re-investment in our community.”

The evidence for that is a new pilot program to integrate social work into the police department. The Health department has one social worker on staff and an intern from the Kutztown Masters program in social work for a full academic year. The intern is a freebie. The social worker is funded mostly by grants, and her work has been shifted around internally to accommodate the pilot. The pilot is beginning soon with one police platoon. After going out on a call, an officer can refer an individual to the social worker for any number of reasons. It is not clear, but Gadfly assumes that any subsequent subject contact with that social worker would be voluntary. The social worker would not go out on calls with an officer. Officers will get training from outside organizations like Turning

Point. Data will be collected during the pilot, providing the basis for enlargement of the program to the other platoons if successful. The plan is to begin with that one platoon in December and expand to the rest of the department in the following year. The source of future funding would be grants. Gadfly did not get a sense that enlargement of the program would include having a social worker make “first contact” calls. If it did, funding would have to be worked out. The hope is that the program as thought of now will save officer time in the field and reduce arrests.

Mayor’s opening statement (2 mins):

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“The tragic death of Mr. George Floyd last spring set off an unprecedented series of events. We have watched on tv, followed on social media, and witnessed in Bethlehem the response that continues across the country and beyond to this day. Social justice, social equity, systemic racism, mental health, peaceful protests, defund — these are words we’ve heard used many times these past months. As Councilman Reynolds stated at a recent City Council meeting, quote, many of these phrases have different definitions for different people. Through these conversations with citizens and government officials, we have heard the calls for re-investment in our community. As a city Bethlehem has long fostered the idea that investing in our community provides opportunities for growth, not only for our citizens but for the city as a whole. Embracing these concepts is what sets Bethlehem apart from other cities and keeps us moving forward. We want to take this opportunity to show City Council the investment we are making, what we have learned from reflection, and what we plan to do moving forward. I believe it is important to spend some time presenting some of the critical support services our city provides in order to address the important issues I have mentioned as well as the new initiatives that are underway before the budget process begins. Tonight’s focus is to explain specific programs that are embedded throughout the budget. In order to do that . . .”

Health director Wenrich and Chief Kott explain the program:

Wenrich (2 mins.)

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Kott (1 min.)

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Councilman Colon and Councilwoman Crampsie Smith ask questions:

Colon (5 mins.)

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Crampsie Smith (3 mins.)

Gadfly, of course, sees lots of good in this new program, as well as in the many existing programs laid out at the Committee of the Whole meeting on October 22.

Gadfly simply sees a higher priority.

New Police Chief Kott was touted at her appointment as “trained in the areas of mental health, cultural awareness, de-escalation tactics, implicit bias, and crisis intervention,” and Gadfly was hoping to see evidence of such things in the plans by the Chief right out of the gate.