

Gadfly Forum highlight: Council candidate Wilhelm on helping small business

The Bethlehem Gadfly Forum, Gadfly Forum May 12, 2021

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

“It’s crucial that we provide swift, equitable, and easily accessible funding to help our small businesses *stay* in business.”

Kiera Wilhelm

The prompt:

Please pick one campaign or platform issue and elaborate on it.

What do you most look forward to working on in your term on Council?

For responses by other Council candidates to this prompt, click [here](#).

Kiera Wilhelm

The meaningful relationships I have developed with small business owners in Bethlehem through my work at Fig have brought this community, and the issues they face, close to my heart. I have always admired, deeply, the extraordinary hard work and dedication it takes to launch a small business. But this past year, I have been in awe. Forced closures, capacity reductions, layoffs, complex and time-consuming grant applications, learning how to keep customers and staff safe in a pandemic—the list of unimaginable challenges goes on.



With over \$33 million of funding coming to Bethlehem through the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, the City will have the opportunity to provide desperately needed support to small business owners: to help them keep and hire back employees, provide debt relief, cover the cost of upgrades

and strategies required to keep customers safe, and more. It's crucial that we provide swift, equitable, and easily accessible funding to help our small businesses *stay* in business. And not only the funding itself, but the guidance and information to help small business owners navigate the process of applying for and utilizing it. This involves direct communication with small business owners themselves and working closely with those already serving the important role of supporting our small business community—including our existing economic development team, organizations like CADCB, and individuals like Missy Hartney with the SouthSide Arts District and Tammy Wendling with the Downtown Bethlehem Association (both of whom have worked tirelessly to guide our small business owners through the ever-shifting landscape of the past year).

We must look beyond the pandemic, as well. What do our small business owners need to succeed and feel supported by the City in the long term, and how can we better provide that support? What can we do to create an even more vibrant small business community? Can we improve practices with regard to inviting entrepreneurship and encouraging new small business owners to choose Bethlehem? How can we, as a City, more actively promote our local businesses? What mistakes have we made in the past, and how can we correct them? How can we make it as easy as possible for great small businesses to open, expand, and thrive—not just post-pandemic, but well into the future?

Small businesses are often referred to as the lifeblood of the US economy, for good reason. Spending that we do at local businesses helps our local economy. Small businesses create jobs, drive innovation, and enable us to purchase products made locally. And small business owners are members of our community, too. They are neighbors and friends; they know our favorite item on the menu, how we take our coffee. They, and the work they do, provide character and individuality to Bethlehem. They are invested, deeply, in what happens here. And the past year has challenged them like no other. Celebrating and supporting small business is more important than ever, and taking a greater role in helping our hard-working community of small business owners thrive—now and into the future—will be a great privilege and responsibility of my role on Bethlehem City Council.