

The Zoning Board controversy: part 2

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Serious Issues August 23, 2019

(The latest in a series of posts on City government)

It must be stressed that virtually all information about the events leading up to the withdrawal of the nomination presented at the August 20 Council meeting comes from Councilman Callahan (BC). Nominee1 did not attend the Council meeting (though BC said she may attend and speak next time). We do not have any information directly from Nominee1. Neither Councilwoman Van Wirt (PVW) nor Councilman Reynolds (JWR) gave any facts about their involvement in the events. Again, virtually all information comes from BC.

Let's start at the base of the gyre focusing narrowly on the point closest to Councilwoman Van Wirt's phone call to Nominee1 — the triggering event for Councilman Callahan.

Councilman Callahan (BC) was “very disappointed by the actions of Councilman Reynolds (JWR), Councilwoman Negron (ON), and Councilwoman Van Wirt (PVW) for their lack of support and the pulling of the name of the highly qualified and ethical candidate for the Zoning Board for no other reason than a couple of perfectly legal campaign donations for her Council race.”

BC became involved when Nominee1 contacted him after receiving a call from PVW that BC characterized as “[expressing] concern about her ethics if she didn't recuse herself.” Nominee1 felt “a little strong-armed and intimidated” by the phone call from PVW. PVW “had asked her that unless she guaranteed that she would recuse herself from participating in any discussion while on the Zoning for anybody that gave her a donation that [she] would not support her.”

(Recuse: to disqualify (oneself) as judge in a particular case; to remove (oneself) from participation to avoid a conflict of interest.)

Nominee1's response to PVW was "that she couldn't promise [her] that — that she would take each case on a case-by-case issue and do what's best for the City of Bethlehem. She wouldn't recuse herself if she thought it was a good project, and she didn't want to recuse herself if she thought it was a bad project."

BC advised Nominee1 to contact the Mayor, the Zoning Board chair, and the City solicitor.

BC addressing PVW:

- "You're questioning a woman's ethics, right," a woman with a 25-year record of service, and "she's never-ever been questioned."
- "You're trying to pigeon-hole someone into not participating in something you are not in favor of."
- "The thought process . . . is that someone becomes pro-something because they got donations, and it's incomprehensible to them [PVW, JWR, ON], I think, that maybe the reason why they are getting the donations is because that's their view, their opinion."
- In other words, Nominee1 was not susceptible to forming a view/opinion *because* of the donations. The donations did not/would not influence her. She *already held* certain views/opinions.
- "For a member of Council to call up and bully someone, and that was her [Nominee1's] term not mine, that she felt she was being strong-armed, I thought that was highly unethical."

- “To tell me or anyone else that you are unethical because of your beliefs and that because of your beliefs the people who like those beliefs are participating in the process [is wrong].”
- “It’s a shame that people can’t take campaign contributions from union members and economic development people when she already has the interests; it’s not like she wasn’t interested in economic development, economic development gave her a donation, now she’s pro-economic development — she’s always been pro-economic development, pro-business. Big difference.”
- “There’s a lot of inconsistencies . . . that I think are extremely unfair to tell someone who has been nothing but ethical in her life that you are unethical because she wouldn’t agree to something [PVW] demanded.”

For BC, Nominee1 is a good person — an ethical person — treated unfairly as a result of unethical behavior as perceived by a Council member (focusing here just on PVW).

(Unethical: not conforming to a high moral standard : morally wrong)

Chew on this for a while.

Has Gadfly fairly captured BC’s position narrowly focusing on the action by PVW — (other elements will be discussed later)? Note that he has tried to use BC’s exact words.

What do you think? Is BC right or wrong? Was the decision to pull the nomination right or wrong?

Join Gadfly next time for some analysis.

Gadfly invites your responses throughout his discussion here and in future posts on this topic, but he asks that you treat this “case” as almost a classroom exercise and not make personal comments regarding Nominee1.