Laying the foundation for discussing the process of reappointments to our Authorities, Boards, and Commissions

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government February 10, 2020

Latest in a series of posts on City Government

So the issue of reappointments to the ABCs — the City's resident-staffed Authorities, Boards, and Commissions that do so much vital City work — generated an interesting and important discussion that ranged through Council's role in the process, the need for evidence for reappointment, the periodic need for new blood, and the possible value of term limits for members on certain ABCs.

You know that one of Gadfly's goals is to help you know your Councilmembers better. Councilman Reynolds was absent (death of his father) and Councilman Colon made only one brief tangential comment, but discussion by the others elicited some clear examples of thought processes and distinguishing viewpoints.

Gadfly will break the discussion down into segments for emphasis and analysis in subsequent posts, but he always recommends going to the primary sources to form your own opinions first. So, to enable you to do that he has spliced together (awkwardly perhaps) the pertinent sections of the entire interesting and important discussion on reappointments.

Note that though there was contesting of the reappointment process, all mayoral nominations were approved, and all parties made clear that the nominees were good people who have given long service to the City — nothing negative was said against any nominee personally. To the contrary, they were thanked for service. We are talking about process not personalities here.

In fact, as prologue, you might want to listen to Gadfly's public comment on this matter at the beginning of the February 4 Council meeting that sets up the discussion that follows by focusing on Council's important oversight responsibility:

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Ok, now here is the complete spliced-together commentary by Council members during the body of the meeting with a summary table of contents, if you will, for easy access and review.

There has been concern lately about Council dynamics and decorum. No problem here, thought Gadfly. There is strong passion but within limits. Especially notable is Councilman Callahan's even manner and low-key tone. And though he walks up to the edge of personal comment at one point, he doesn't "go there." Well done.

What do you think are the key moments, the key parts of this discussion of reappointments of ABC members? Do a little homework, then c'mon back, and next time we'll discuss.

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- In public comment, Gadfly argues for the need for evidence from performance for the reappointment votes coming up. He points out that approving ABC appointments is one of the three great Council responsibilities. He points especially to the Parking Authority. (See audio above too)
- 3:50: the Mayor nominates someone for the Bethlehem Authority.
- 4:10: Councilwoman Negron points out that the nominee has been around for a long time serving in many capacities and wishes in effect, for some new faces rather than recirculating the same people, "the same names floating around."
- 5:40: Councilwoman Van Wirt says the ABCs are a "huge source of power," often a "cloaked power," and asks for more citizen advocate types, perhaps people who represent a different geographic area or have a different point of view. She talks of Council's obligation to represent the citizens, which may mean putting "new blood" on the ABCs — making clear (as everybody will do) that criticisms have nothing personal to do with the individuals nominated, who are to be thanked for their service.
- 7:25: Councilwoman Crampsie Smith asks the Mayor about people wanting to be on the ABCs, about waiting lists, about current vacancies. The Mayor indicates there are few vacancies, he does have

a list of interested people, and he has nominated that Bethlehem Authority nominee for his expertise.

- 9:05: In response to President Waldron, Councilwoman Van Wirt clarifies that "lack of turnover" not the individual is the problem.
- 9:30: Councilwoman Negron indicates we need to make a stronger effort to reach out to people. It's time for "new blood." New people rather than moving the long-serving people around.
- 9:45: President Waldron sees nothing against this nominee, no reason to vote against him just to get new blood.
- 11:40: Councilman Callahan says elections have consequences, the Mayor has prerogatives regarding appointments, Council should defer to the Mayor as a courtesy, and it's hard to remember, except for this year, Council turning down mayoral nominees. He alludes to reasons that are more personal, perhaps political in questioning appointments.
- 13:05: Councilwoman Van Wirt answers that the Council's role is oversight, to counterbalance the Mayor, and calls for representatives with different views and views not traditionally represented. "Just because we have been doing this for perpetuity does not mean it is the right way and should continue."
- 13:47: Councilman Callahan calls again for respecting the Mayor's decision and choice especially since there is no issue with this respected and experienced nominee.
- 14:27: The Mayor nominates someone to the Parking Authority.
- 14:45: Councilwoman Negron repeats the idea of Council role as check and balance and the obligation to the people to not just be a rubber stamp (while expressing dissatisfaction with the committee roles she's been assigned on Council).
- 17:00: Councilwoman Van Wirt focuses on the Parking Authority, which has a "huge public perception problem." "The time has come for a community advocate to be appointed" and "even somebody from the Southside." She makes a spirited explanation of her negative experience with and feelings about the Parking Authority.
- 19:28: Councilwoman Crampsie Smith, sensitive to the importance of this appointment, indicates that she spoke with the nominee, elicited his awareness of the need for communication and transparency, and

will vote for him because she thinks his experience on the Board and his good reputation will be good for the big things that are happening. Interestingly, she broaches the idea of turnover and even term limits.

- 21: 18: President Waldron picks up the idea of term limits from Crampsie Smith as something he's open to discuss, though not in terms of individual nominees now before Council but a policy that everybody can get behind.
- 23:00: The mayor submits another nominee, this time for an ABC that is not a hot-button.
- 23:20: President Waldron asks about the length of this nominee's service on this "cool" ABC, which implicitly raises the question of whether all ABCs would have to be subject to term limits if we had them (which would seem absurd), questioning whether we need "new blood" on such committees as these (less likely).
- 23:42: Councilwoman Van Wirt has an answer. It's the ABCs "that wield the power of the purse" that would be focused on.
- 24:27 President Waldron gets that point.

to be continued . . .