

Supplements to Councilman Callahan's press conference statement

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Ethics, Serious Issues November 26, 2019

 *Latest in a series of posts on Ethics and City Government* 

Gadfly hopes you are watching the videos of Councilman Callahan's press conference yesterday provided in the previous post.

Gadfly does not have a digital copy of Councilman Callahan's statement but is trying to obtain one.

Here are three additional documents that for now complete the information you need to have a full picture of this controversy.

Gadfly has laid the groundwork. Let the good conversation begin.

1) Email from Councilman Callahan to Mayor Donchez October 17, 2019

Mayor,

As I discussed with you a few weeks ago, I have heard of a number of concerns over the last year or so about the pace at which building permits are reviewed and approved in the Department of Community and Economic Development. Specifically, employees, both current and prior, indicated there is deliberate inaction encouraged in the Department by Director Karner to "slow, delay and stall all permits with the end goal being the hiring of more permanent staff with benefits. I've been told that the issue was also reported by Bernie Ohare in the local blog "Lehigh Valley Ramblings" a few months ago. If true, this is most disappointing. I trust the individuals copied on this memo to keep this issue between us until the matter is looked into and resolved. I am asking

that Mr. Lesson and Mr. Evans interview the current members of the department along with former employee Suzanne Borzak to determine if truly Ms. Karner did instruct her department to slow, delay and stall the permitting process for the stated reasons. I trust Mr. Lesson and Mr. Evans ability and judgement to do a fair investigation for the residents of the City of Bethlehem on this issue.

However, I think some issues may result in hiring people without the needed certifications.

Please confirm in writing any certifications we require to be a code inspector here in Bethlehem. Also , provide in writing the certifications of all the current building inspectors, including the chief building inspector in the department. Can you provide the written advertisement for all inspector positions used by the City , including for the Chief building inspector?

Does the chief building inspector meet the requirements required by City Ordinance 1701.02? If the needed certifications are not in place , please provide a written explanation why such certifications were deemed unnecessary.

Can you please provide the names of all City Code inspectors that can sign off on a building plan?

Can you please provide the names and certifications of all code inspectors hired from 2014 until present?

Also, can you provide whether there are any openings in Code Inspections. If so, when is the anticipated hiring date? Does the positions have a specialty, ie., plumbing, electrical?

I'd appreciate the time this will take and simply ask for a response back within 30 days.

Thanks for your cooperation and in keeping Bethlehem moving forward.

Bryan Callahan

2) “Bethlehem Zoning Appeals Have Spiked,” *Lehigh Valley Ramblings*, June 14, 2019.

Councilman Callahan included reference to this blog post in the media packet at the press conference.

Last year, Bethlehem’s Zoning Hearing Board entertained 34 appeals. This year, through June 12, the number is already 21. Why? Some of you may think there’s more development, but there’s another reason for this sudden increase. Last year, the City of Bethlehem had a zoning officer who actually worked with people and tried to come up with ways to make an appeal unnecessary. Not only did this make people more happy with the City, but property owners would be spared the \$500 cost for an appeal.

Etc.

Councilman Callahan also included the 26 comments on this blog post, so be sure to look at them.

3) Email from Councilman Callahan to Mayor Donchez November 21, 2019

(City Business Administrator Eric Evans called Councilman Callahan November 20 to set up a meeting with City officials, but Councilman Callahan declined that meeting.)

Mayor,

It was very obvious and clear to me after reading your first sentence that you had no intention of interviewing the participants, “Your memo of

October 21 does not provide sufficient cause to conduct the investigation requested”, you had no interest in even looking into the subject!!

You then stated that, based on their advice (not your own sense of right and wrong) that if I provided documents, names, particulars.....and indicia of corroboration that you might reconsider.

The ironic thing is that just as I finished reading your letter, you then started reading a prepared statement to all of Council, and while my name was not mentioned, the comments were clearly directed at me. In your comments you questioned my tone of voice and that my questioning of the Dept. Head Ms. Karner, “was unprovoked, out of order, without cause and completely out of line”. You then stated that you would no longer require your department heads to attend council meetings if questioned or in your words “attacked”.

Mayor, I nor anyone else on Council has the right to conduct interviews of your cabinet members/Department Heads or the employees under your charge and direction.

I also can't provide or guarantee, to the two current employees, protection if they speak the truth about what they were directed to do by Ms. Karner or from retribution from Ms. Karner, as like what happened to Ms. Borzak.

I simply told Mr. Evans in yesterday's phone call that it's your job to get to the bottom of what happened. Last night after I told Mr. Evans that I had shared the memos with the press, it was only then that you asked for me to come in to discuss what I knew. As I told Mr. Evans, after your comments and remarks directed at me at Council on Tuesday night.....that ship has sailed. It's your responsibility to interview those employees.....not mine.

That is what the 76,000 residents and taxpayers would expect?

For the stated reasons above, other than Ms. Karner, I have a great working relationship with every one of your Department Heads. In fact I often socialize outside of City business with several of them.

For the first six years that I have been on Council, we as a whole have worked together professionally and collegially. My current issues with some members of Council began early last Summer when Ms. Karner fired a great long term city employee (1 of the 3 employees who Ms. Karner directed to “delay, slow down and stall all permits”). She was regarded as one of the City of Bethlehem’s best employees who worked extremely hard, competently and professionally under other Mayors and Dept Heads with absolutely no issues.

At that time I asked you to bring Council into executive session so we could, in private, discuss the matter. You denied my request. I then asked Council as a whole to move to executive session. Taking the lead from a Council member who is currying favor for a Mayoral endorsement from you in a year and a half , they did not agree to go into executive session.

From that point on I have become more vocal at Council and, I will admit, I have had a “tone” that something isn’t right here.

I know and I do realize that I have a strong personality but you have to understand that since the loss of my wife 13 years ago to cancer I have become more passionate and intense.....and yes I even speak with more energy, emotion and tone.

Time and life is short and I intend to spend, I hope, the next 20 years helping to fix and solve the problems and issues in our great city.

As Ted Kennedy said of his brother Robert during his eulogy many years ago, “he saw a wrong and tried to right it”. Well , on a very much smaller scale in our little city.....that’s what I am going to do. That is exactly why I also spoke up so strongly about how wrong it is to charge children the same price as charging an adult at the golf driving range.

In every single recreational fee that the City charges (Tennis, Swimming Pools, Ice Rink, and 18 hole and seasonal rates) the driving range is the **only** recreational facility that does not have a youth rate vs. an adult rate.

Shouldn't we be encouraging children to get outside and off of all the video games? Isn't that what the recreational department is for?

I hope you will take this letter and do what is right for not only the employees in the Community Economic Department who want to work hard but also for the parents who wondered where the permit was for the pool that they wanted to put in for their kids at the beginning of last Summer, but couldn't because they didn't have the necessary permit, the Senior Citizen who waited for a permit for his deck or patio, the neighbor who waited for a permit for their addition and the contractor waiting for a permit so that he could start working on a job that he needs to pay his bills.

This is real life.....not a game!

We all love Bethlehem.....We are all on the same team!

Sincerely,

Councilman Bryan Callahan

Yes, Gadfly has laid the groundwork. Let the good conversation begin.