

Parking Authority to Council: identify what you want

The Bethlehem Gadfly Parking, Serious Issues October 24, 2019

🧊 135th in a series of posts on parking 🧊

Nicole Radzievich, “Parking meter rates went up this year in Bethlehem. Look what’s going up next year.” Morning Call, October 23, 2019.

So as detailed in the [last several posts in this parking thread](#), moderate voices prevailed at the last Council meeting on the subject of raising the long-locked parking fines.

Council decided to approve raising the fines per the Parking Authority request, but at the same time what Gadfly would take to be a majority of Council favored as well exploring some new ideas for the parking system — such as those proposed by Councilwoman Van Wirt — with the BPA.

PVW’s idea was to do a pilot program on selected areas of the Northside and Southside where parking would be free for a limited amount of time (2 hrs? 3 hrs?) but where the fines would be significantly increased (\$30? \$40?).

These recent interactions with City Council were discussed by the BPA at yesterday’s BPA Board meeting.

Here is the short audio of that discussion:

AUDIO FILES NOT AVAILABLE IN THIS ARCHIVE

Rough summary below, but you know Gadfly always says go to the primary source, don't depend on him!

The Board chair tells the BPA Board that he told Council he would be willing to discuss Council ideas, and he proposes sending a memo next week to Council asking for their specific ideas, asking whether they would put money into the pilot program, asking for documentation of studies of other cities. If Council would put their ideas together, he says, the Board would be more than happy to listen to them. To which the BPA Exec dir says that when we get their return memo, he will put the item on the Board meeting agenda as New Business. One participant in the meeting then suggested a modification, that the Board wait on sending the memo to Council till they hear if there is any discussion of specific ideas by Council members along with the two votes. The following group conversation goes like this. After the votes, we'll have more of an idea what they want. It isn't clear they [Council] are all swimming together right now. We need to know what the majority of Council wants. We don't want to go down a road and then they say that's not what we were talking about. We want the majority of the Council to tell us what they're looking for. There's a dangerous or slippery slope if we have to chase one idea, then another, then another — it gets expensive. We will be asking Council to give us a letter back from Council identifying what they want.

So, as Gadfly understands it, the BPA will not contact Council now. The BPA will listen for whatever further ideas are put forth in discussion of the votes on the fine increases during the next two Council meetings, then ask for one specific proposal backed by Council for the BPA to consider.

See if that's what you got out of the audio.

Now Gadfly will take BPA willingness to consider Council ideas as a good thing.

He wonders, though, if this process is what PVW envisioned. Gadfly thinks she envisioned herself going to BPA with whomever Council members wanted to join her (JWR used the term “on board”) to discuss her idea(s) *with* the BPA.

What Gadfly heard — he could be way off, of course — was that the BPA will be looking for presentation of a formal Council position/plan. So that means PVW would need to negotiate a Council consensus before going to BPA.

Now that might be a good thing. The request for a pilot would have more force coming from full Council. And if Council were going to kick in some money as the BPA would be looking for, then some formal agreement on appropriation would be necessary anyway (does Council have discretionary funds? or would this come from the City budget?).

But Gadfly — ever the idealist — wishes that Council members and the BPA Board could work together from the beginning on the very formation of a pilot, that the specific plan would grow out of cooperative ideas from both sides, that BPA would feel part ownership of the plan itself rather than just the managers of a laboratory setting up an expensive experiment to test someone else’s idea.

For instance, take the proposal by the Mayor but coming from the public and Council members to consider variable rate parking. It had no discussion at BPA. Gadfly is not sure some BPA Board members even know what variable rate parking is, much less that the BPA was asked to study it. Somebody authorized a consultant study for (it sounds like from an off-hand comment at yesterday’s meeting) \$25,000. Gadfly sees nothing of that in BPA minutes. It’s pretty obvious to Gadfly that BPA saw the process of studying variable rate parking as wasted time and money — just something that they went through the motions about because forced to.

Gadfly fears that would be the way that a free-parking pilot would be handled.

The basic problem that PVW and other innovators have, Gadfly thinks, is that the BPA doesn't see there is a problem needing to be addressed.

Joint recognition of a problem seems to Gadfly to be the problem.