



Bethlehem's Year of Floyd (3): The NAACP Community Advisory Board

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [George Floyd anniversary](#), [Modest proposals](#) May 4, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts regarding the George Floyd anniversary* 

Gadfly is modestly proposing that City Council mark the anniversary of George Floyd's death at a Public Safety meeting on May 25, 2021. A year gives us some distance on our efforts to act on the significance of his death and a perspective on the challenges it presented to the City. Gadfly continues here a quasi-history of the "Year of Floyd" as seen through his eyes and the pages of the blog. One man's version. As always, Gadfly invites you to join in.

We ended the **last post** wondering if strong words by several members of City Council at the June 2, 2020, meeting, 8 days after George Floyd's death, would result in some action.

It did.

- Before the June 16 City Council meeting, Councilpersons Reynolds and Crampsie Smith sent **a memo** to Chief Diluzio regarding publication of the department's Use of Force policy and setting up a Community Engagement Initiative within the department.
- The Mayor and the Chief **responded** in the affirmative.
- And there was some preliminary discussion of these matters at the June 16 City Council meeting.

The first concrete action, however, came not from the City but the NAACP.

At the June 16 meeting the Mayor announced that the City would work with the NAACP in its desire to form what would be called a Community Advisory Board: "NAACP vigil representatives from the local chapter of the NAACP, the Mayor, the Police Chief, the Deputy Chief and the

President of the FOP met with the leaders of the NAACP to discuss police community issues. It was agreed that a citizen's advisory committee, a suggestion of NAACP President Esther Lee, be comprised of community leaders would be established to address police and community issues. There would be community leaders from education, healthcare, social agencies, etc. and we all hope and agree to do a press release and a mission statement next week. Mayor Donchez reported that Ms. Lee feels very strongly from her leadership role and from the national organization and the local chapter of the NAACP that this is something she wants to be involved in. We certainly want to work with her and be part of the citizen's advisory committee."

In a **newspaper article** on July 8, we find:

On Monday, the creation of a 21-member NAACP community advisory board was announced. The board will meet monthly to review Bethlehem's law enforcement policies, including use of force, police training and transparency. There will also be discussions about how race affects other issues like health, housing and education.

The new community advisory board was created on the advice of the national NAACP, which directed its local chapters to meet with police, said Esther Lee, the longtime president of the Bethlehem NAACP. The board includes Mayor Robert Donchez, members of City Council, the Bethlehem Police Department, Bethlehem Health Department, clergy, students, members of the Bethlehem NAACP, Northampton County Executive Lamont McClure and Bethlehem Area School Superintendent Joseph Roy.

"Our desire is to initiate immediate change for encouraging transparency, accountability and effective communication that will stabilize the climate of the Bethlehem community and adjacent communities which are needed in these tumultuous times," Lee said.

Rallies across the country and calls for police reform were sparked by the May 25 killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police and the deaths in recent years of other unarmed Black men across the country at the hands

of police. While there haven't been such occurrences in Bethlehem, Lee said members of the local NAACP felt they should come forward to discuss issues of social justice reform with leaders in the community.

"I've been here all my life. I think it's time for us to come together, sit at the table and come to an agreement on how we can make life a little better," she said. Donchez said the group has met three times since June 15 and will meet again Monday [July 12]. His goal is to release a community report on some of the initiatives discussed. Last month, the city was the first in the Lehigh Valley to release its police department's use-of-force policy.

This CAB sounds like such a good idea.

Gadfly could be wrong, but he is not sure *anything* has ever been made public about the CAB's doings, now entering its 11th month of operation.

He knows the CAB is functioning, since a Councilwoman recently remarked that she's on a CAB homelessness sub-committee — which sounds like a great thing that we'd all like to know more about.

As far as Gadfly knows, **membership on the CAB** was never announced. He had to wheedle it out of a mole in the city bureaucracy. Representation by Black Lives Matters and such organizations were noticeably absent from the membership list. Which is curious.

Gadfly tried to get info on the CAB by filing a right-to-know request, but he was rebuffed because the CAB is not a City entity but "belongs" to the NAACP. Gadfly sees nothing about it on the local NAACP website or Facebook page.

Wouldn't a meeting to mark the May 25 anniversary of the murder of George Floyd be a good time to ask the NAACP to report to the City on what the CAB has done, is doing, and plans to do? And whether City involvement has been fruitful and productive.

To Gadfly, the silence seems very strange.

to be continued . . .