

Advancing the Community Engagement Initiative, Police on board

The Bethlehem Gadfly Community Engagement Initiative, Police October 9, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Community Engagement Initiative* 

Followers know that Gadfly has been whining about lack of information about the development of the Community Engagement Initiative, a proposal that was adopted by City Council July 7.

The CEI was proposed in a resolution by Councilman Reynolds and Councilwoman Crampsie Smith. Councilman Reynolds seems to be the driving force.

Subsequent to July 7, Councilman Reynolds briefly sketched out that the CEI could have two types of meeting:

- a City-run traditional meeting such as scheduled **October 29** (the nature of which has yet to be described)
- by various community organizations (such as at the **Hispanic Center** October 27)

At Tuesday's City Council meeting, Councilman Reynolds finally laid down a plan for this second type meeting.

- every month there would be a list of events
- the list would be generated by members of Council (who, according to JWR, are "pretty connected" and have a good idea what's going on)
- Council members will be counseled to send items for that list to the City Clerk by a certain date each month
- the City Clerk will assemble the list
- the City will publish the list each month through its communication channels (Ha! I hope they include the Gadfly!)
- the public and City folk can then know about and participate in the meetings

The key component, said Councilman Reynolds, will be “real involvement” from the Police department and involvement beyond the Chief to other officers, though the Councilman wasn’t envisioning full force participation.

Councilman Reynolds cited the importance in his own work as a teacher to go out and listen to the people in the community, an experience that can be an “eye-opener” and cause important significant self-reflection in realizing where the community is coming from.

Councilman Reynolds invited the brand new Chief to weigh in on whether the Police Department would participate in these community meetings, and Chief Kott gave strong support.

Here in what is her first significant public statement is the clip of Chief Kott providing her affirmation of the department’s participation in the CEI:

- Absolutely.
- That’s the way we are going to build that relationship is through positive, non-enforcement contact.
- And not only is it going to help strengthen the bond between our officers and the community, but it’s also going to build that equity, it’s going to build that legitimacy.
- And it’s going to help remind our officers why they became officers in the first place.
- Because our officers want to go out into the community.
- They want to help community members.
- And that’s what our community is asking for.
- It’s easy to try to think up what exactly the public wants.
- It’s time to listen, not only to the community, but to our officers who want community engagement.
- And I absolutely agree with you that it cannot be just the same one or two faces going to community events.
- That’s not going to help build that relationship back.

- That strength — you need to have it from a top to bottom approach, to have all members of the department engaged in community policing.
- And I am very confident that the men and women of the Bethlehem Police Department want to take part in it.