

# Divides . . . (5)

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues January 9, 2019

*(5th in a series of posts on City Government)*

Gadfly sitting here Tuesday night waiting for the president to speak.

Mind naturally turning to “divides.”

Gadfly posted recently on the Mayor’s annual report and President Waldron’s annual City Council report.

He’s thought about doing a Gadfly annual report (though only 3 months in service).

But that’s kinda pompous.

But if he did, one of the things he would say on looking back is that he saw division on Council.

Two competing visions of “neighborhood.” Two views of the Southside. Two images of developers.

Gadfly even previously wrote about the Southside in [Final observations on 2 W. Market – Part 4: the Great Divide \(74\)](#)

Nothing unusual about division. Nothing especially negative about it.

But worthy of noting. And wondering what effect it has on Council operations. And on life in the City.

## **Two views of neighborhood**

In the rough going of the 2 W. Market debate, CM Reynolds crystallized that marathon for me when he said, “There are different people in this room that have different definitions of what it means to live in a neighborhood.” That line straightened me up. That line framed the debate for me. On the one side there’s the “cup o’ sugar”/”eyes on the street” definition of a neighborhood. Easily caricatured, as in fact, it was throughout the debate. But real, worthy, and, in fact, an easily

understandable and desirable image. Over the holidays, for instance, I was picking up my paper on the porch when Art, the guy I share my west wall with, said, “Eddie [people seem to address me as if I were a teenager!], Eddie, I got up to pee last night, looked out the back kitchen window, and there was a guy standing at our back fences. He saw me and took off down the alley.” Yeah, eyes on the street. Much appreciated, Art.

That’s one definition of a neighborhood. Another has to do with being the first one to shovel your sidewalk, to decorate your house seasonally, to participate in the Luminaria, to create no parking problems. That’s another way of defining neighborhood and neighborliness. Just as real. Just as worthy. But that’s two different definitions, as CM Reynolds said.

That’s two different images. In a dispute over the definition of neighborhood, one side is unlikely to persuade the other. And neither side is wrong. The roots of those definitions are deeper than argument. So what to do when disputes arise? My answer was (and is) that you look for the center that unites us, that the only thing you can do is look to impartial law (Comprehensive Plan, zoning ordinances, judicial decision). Anything else is deciding subjectively and bound to only propel the dispute.

## **Two views of the Southside**

In a way, this is also two views of neighborhood. I’ll try not to repeat all that I said in my [Great Divide post](#). CM Callahan is a half-century Bethlehem native, thoroughly aware of the Southside, though not living there. CW Negron hasn’t lived in Bethlehem as long, but she has lived here a substantial time, a generation, and she has lived on the Southside during that time. Can there be visions any different? Let’s paraphrase

CM Reynolds: “There are different people in this room that have different definitions of what it means to live on the Southside.” BC’s Joe the barber, a Southside resident, tells him one thing; my Mike the barber, a Southside native, tells me the opposite. Is one right? Is one wrong? Several times during the 2 W. Market debate, people would say, just go up the street, look at the house, see it, it’s right there, no guessing how it will turn out. When I heard that I would look north, and an imaginary iris would open on the wall, and, yes, I would see the beautiful 2 Wester in mind’s eye. And then when Gadfly #1 Antalics and CW

Negron would reference the cancer that hit the Southside, a like imaginary iris would open for me on the south wall of Town Hall, and I would see the view up the alley between Birkel and Montclair as I leave Wendy's, and, yes, I see the ravages of the ugly cancer. Both visions are true. When BC sees the Southside, he sees it from the outside: arts, shops, schools, bars, restaurants, lighting, residential facades. When ON sees the Southside (and I'm guessing a bit here because she has not expanded as BC has), she's thinking of homes, where families start, grow, thrive – where roots are planted. BC, it seems, sees primarily a place to work and visit; ON thinks of a place to live. They simply have two different sets of “eyes.” It's hard to see through someone else's eyes. But we all have to try. Especially leaders. Mutual understanding needed.

Vigorously intoning “you don't have a clue” in ON's direction as BC did recently, only propels the divide. If more harmony is desirable, I would invoke my favorite philosopher, Dr. Phil, who says, “somebody has to be a hero in this relationship.”

### **Two images of developers**

Gadfly readily admits his limitation. He knows 9 uses of the comma, but he understands little of TIFFs and LERTAs and CRIZs. He was in awe when CM Reynolds instantaneously calculated what a change in millage would mean for the average taxpayer during a budget meeting. CM Callahan's recent “who pays the damn bills?” struck him hard. The implication being the answer was developers, certainly not in whole, but seemingly in significant part, and seemingly in that part that makes a crucial difference in the quality of our lives and the claim of Bethlehem to be a first-class city (number of police officers, city services, etc.). Made me think how little I know about funding a city. Developers – angels or demons? It's clear that our leaders are divided on this, and there is an oft expressed belief from people in the cheap seats that developers rule. CM Callahan openly courts, canonizes, and congratulates the developer/investor.

It seems he sees money as the solution to problems, the answer to needs. CW Van Wirt, on the other hand, recognizes a problem when money rules, when money calls the shots – we lose control of defining who we are – and feels there is a way for the city to successfully manage the developers rather than the reverse. I was thinking about this today in

regard to the Maze garden that used to be at 3<sup>rd</sup> and New before the Benner building. It was considered inappropriate as the gateway to the Southside or, should I say, to a certain image of what the Southside should be.

But think of what an interesting statement of the kind of city we are if the gateway is a garden, a living space, communally tended by representatives of all ages and types, literally serving/feeding the community – a place of natural beauty, a place to work with the earth, and rest and enjoy it. But I digress. The garden was never meant to be permanent there. “Feet on the street” was the mantra, and for that we needed a developer. I have been trying to get a handle on how I feel about developers and about the nature and function of investment. A few days ago, regarding the Mayor’s annual report, Peter Crownfield posted that “the Mayor [and, for instance, CM Callahan?] looks at the state of the city primarily in terms of economic development, which so often has a negative impact on community development.” Hmmm, what exactly does that mean?

That distinction between economic development and community development intrigues me. Are there contrasting measures on how we judge “the state of the city”? So, I’m kinda hoping Peter or someone else will run with this distinction a bit. Would it help me understand the ambivalence toward developers I have? Or the mindview that favors developers?

Been rushing here at the end. Am I making any sense? Saying anything worthy of response?

For instance, as Gadfly said in the previous post, should one even care about such divisions? Maybe they are just natural and productive.

Off to watch the Trumpster!