

# Allentown Councilman Siegel: “We can both praise the cops for doing good work and also re-imagine public safety”

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police August 1, 2020

👉 Latest in a series of posts responding to the George Floyd killing 👈

## Allentown City Council meeting July 29, 2020, video

mins. 3:10:05 – 3:16:00

Gadfly reminds you that we’ve been following the Allentown discussion on police matters triggered by the murder of George Floyd. His purpose, as always, is to lay out all the voices on an issue to aid us in making up our own minds.

We end here with the spirited conclusion to the meeting by Councilman Siegel, the co-sponsor with Councilwoman Gerlach of the Allentown resolution, the most spirited segment of the meeting.

Gadfly invites you to reflect on what you saw, on what we can learn from the Allentown proceedings. What issues, what arguments, what “styles” caught your attention?

### Councilman Siegel:

This is unfortunate in our country that we constantly refer to ourselves . . . immediately revert to the ideological ways of framing our world. You’re anti-cop, you’re pro-cop, liberal, you’re a Republican, you’re progressive, you’re not, it’s all frankly BS, and it’s a way to just structure the world in a way that pits us against each other. I’ve been called a hypocrite in previous weeks, and frankly it’s a crock of crap. I’m not a hypocrite. I think we can both praise the police



department for the good work you do when you guys catch criminals, when you take drug gangs off the streets, when you take drugs and guns off the streets, that is keeping us safe and you deserve every bit of praise for doing it. But don't think that that insulates institutions and organizations from criticism for things that they do wrong. You can do both. We can both praise the cops for doing good work and also re-imagine public safety in this country and look for ways in which we can spend our money better. Maybe that means making sure when you think you're having a mental health crisis or you're going through a social issue or a substance abuse issue that the cops aren't the first freakin' call, the first person on the scene. And, by the way, there are models in this country that work, are models that we can apply to Allentown. Yes that we need to adjust. Yes we must adjust to the fact that there might be language barriers or racial discrepancies but when Eugene, Oregon, can do Cahoots [?], when they can take care of 17% of their call line for 2% of their police budget and last year there were 24,000 Cahoots calls and only 150 of them required police back up, I'm sick and tired of people mischaracterizing these incidents as devolving into violence and chaos. We heard some of these letters tonight, I just hear the vitriol and the racism and the freaking backwards thinking that comes through. To insinuate that I want to divest money or redirect money . . . that I am in favor of rape and murder and gangs, are you kidding me? What kind of deranged, delusional, paranoid mindset does that emanate from? That's not healthy, that's not contributing to the conversation. I've had many people email me over the last few weeks, called me names, called me derogatory things. You know what, I emailed them back and had honest, frank, and genuine conversation trying to find consensus with them. You know, with a lot of the people we found common ground. Everybody in this country deserves respect, and I'm not going to draw a false equivalency between the racist and vitriolic statements that we have gotten . . . spray the protestors down with hoses . . . they said they're all on welfare. Absolutely freakin' not. I'm not going to draw a comparison between that and people who have faced 400 years of structural oppression and death and violence and say that's the same thing as their

yelling at the cops and these people are calling them animals. It's not the same freakin' thing, we should not draw that false equivalency. We should not cast them in the same way as people who show up with American flags with crosses on them, we know what that means, we know what they're getting at, we know they are white supremacists who try to infiltrate that, we know where one side is coming from. Ok, we want to have an honest conversation in the city, I'm more than ready, and Chief I'm prepared to work with you in any way I can. I want you to be a partner in this, I want you to be an ally. I don't hate you, I respect you, I think we can be friends, I've never said anything bad about you. I want you and I to be partners and friends but at the same time recognize that change and real leadership is about confronting institutions, it's about having uncomfortable conversations, change is not doing what we all agree on, change is not saying these are the things that don't offend any of us so that's what we're going to do. That's not change, that's the illusion of change., that's symbolic justice, that's us flying the Pride flag but behind the scenes saying transphobic stuff, that's companies in America tweeting Black Lives Matter but then not fully paying their taxes to fully fund our schools. We're done with symbolic justice in this country, we're done with symbolic gestures, we're going to actually put our money where our mouth is as a city because the world is watching, the country is watching, and you'd better believe the citizens of Allentown are watching, and they're gonna have their voices heard. And I'm more than prepared to keep an open mind. As we talked tonight I realized there are things that I put on this list that we thought might have been possible and they have a state dynamic. I'm more than willing to understand that I was wrong about how we could do some of these things. I thought there was a local dynamic, clearly there isn't. I am an open-minded individual, I evolve, and I change, and I respect that I'm not always right. I was wrong about some of these things, we adapted and adjusted, and now we're going to do a state-wide approach, but the things we can do at the local level, you better darn well believe we are going to. I have 4 years, I may only get 4 years, the people of Allentown may keep me from doing what I'm doing, but I'm going to do what I

think is right. And I'm going to work in every capacity that I can from this day and the day I may be removed from office but I'm going to do what's right. And I want to say to everybody on this stage that you might not like me, you might not like what I stand for, I respect you as my colleagues, I respect you as professionals that I will work with, but, believe me, I'm going to hold you individually accountable, when I disagree where we are ideologically. That's all I'm going to say. I will never call people names. I will never besmirch your personal character, but I will call you out when we are ideologically different, and I will push you to be on the right side of what I think the issue is, and I hope you can understand that. That's the nature of politics, that's the nature of elected leaders, that the nature of being leaders. We will butt heads because we have strong values and convictions. And I just want to make that clear that now is the time for real action and that's going to make people feel uncomfortable and I'm sorry. It's easy to run for office . . . the hard part comes when you have to start making the changes . . . I apologize to you for the email, for what I did it was wrong . . . should not have released your phone number, I fucked up, shouldn't have done that, that was my fault, it's on me, I own that mistake, shouldn't have done it . . . me being a man, I screwed up, I violated your trust. That reflects poorly on me, I get that. But at the end of the day we all have a job to do. I'm gonna close with this. John F. Kennedy said we should not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, let us find the right answer. Let us not blame the past but all collectively accept responsibility for the future. And that's what we have to do. This is not about partisanship, not about who we are but finding the right answer, that means putting aside our emotions and our egos and following the facts like you said Chief, what works, what's evidence based. And that's it.

*Councilman Siegel's rapid delivery presented a challenge here and there for transcription. Gadfly apologizes for any errors.*