

We look inside the department for a new Police Chief

The Bethlehem Gadfly Police September 16, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police* 

The Mayor is moving quickly to hire a permanent Chief of Police from a pool of four current officers. Council will vote on the Mayor's choice at their next meeting October 6. Among reasons for hiring from inside were the department is "not dysfunctional," there are qualified candidates, and hiring an outside candidate might be unfair to the candidate since a new Mayor is on the horizon. One can assume that Deputy Chief, now interim Chief Scott Meixell and Capt. Michelle Kott are two of the four. Perhaps insider followers can provide Gadfly with the names of the other two. Former Upper Macungie Police Chief Edgardo Colon is Latino, but one wonders if, besides the usual suspects, the search committee shouldn't have contained 1) someone deeply conversant with some of the new ways of policing that are being discussed nationally and 2) someone from the general public. In offering the search committee the best of luck, Councilman Colon said, "Obviously we are having a lot of discussions, meetings, groups getting together, community groups to talk about policing." That caught Gadfly, who's been whining about the lack of visible movement after the August 11 Public Safety Committee meeting, by surprise. For it sounds like a lot's been going on. Sigh. Nobody tells Gadfly nuthin'.

selections from Christina Tatu, "Who will be Bethlehem's next police chief? City looking at four internal candidates, expects to decide by Monday." Morning Call, September 15, 2020.

An internal search is underway for Bethlehem's next police chief and a decision is expected next week, said Mayor Robert Donchez, who has accepted applications from four city officers interested in the job.

A hiring committee that includes Donchez, city solicitor William Leeson, Human Resources Director Michelle Cichocki, Business Administrator Eric Evans and retired Upper Macungie police Chief Edgardo Colon will conduct interviews this week.

Third Class City Code requires Bethlehem officials fill the position internally unless no qualified candidates can be found. It will be up to Donchez to recommend one of the candidates for approval by City Council, which will vote on the recommendation at its Oct. 6 meeting.

A letter went out last week inviting anyone with the rank of lieutenant, captain or deputy chief to apply. Applications were due Friday, Donchez said.

Donchez did not name the four candidates for the permanent job.

Donchez is confident the police department already has qualified candidates who know the city. In addition, Donchez's term as mayor ends in 15 months. He thinks it would be unfair to ask a national candidate to relocate right before a change in administration.

"I don't believe we need to go outside. There's always room to improve, but we are not a police department that's corrupt. We aren't a dysfunctional police department," Donchez said, noting the department is accredited at both the state and national levels.

Sorry to see Bethlehem police chief go

Why did Bethlehem Police Chief Mark DiLuzio back down and apologize? What he reposted was true. These sport people are spoiled multimillionaire little brats.

And it is time to respect the flag and the people who died for this country and made it possible for them to have the life they have today.

Good for you, Chief DiLuzio. Sorry to see you go. God bless America.

Wes Schraden
Allentown

Councilwoman Olga Negrón previously told *The Morning Call* she thinks the city would be prudent to look beyond its own for leadership.

"This is a great opportunity to rethink how we police, and this might be a good opportunity to bring in someone from outside," she said Sept. 4 when DiLuzio announced his retirement.

Councilwoman Paige Van Wirt said it's most important to bring in a chief who is on board with creating a more diverse police force that can address the community's concerns and work toward change.

While a person of color or a woman would offer some symbolic change, Van Wirt said during a Sept. 4 interview that can't be the sole purpose for selecting an individual.

"This really is about finding the right person. They have to understand the issues and grapple with the issues and not just be a symbol," she said.

Esther Lee, a longtime civil rights activist and president of the Bethlehem NAACP, said her group was not consulted on the city's search for a chief, but she believes hiring someone already in Bethlehem's ranks would be best.

"I think communities ought to have police and their chiefs be more local," she said, adding that most people in the community aren't familiar with the city's police officers, and hiring someone through a national search could add to that disconnect.

Lee hopes the city will include a member of the Black community on its hiring committee.

Donchez said he talked to Lee about who would be on the hiring committee and went with Colon, who is Latino, because of his experience as a police chief and because Colon grew up in Bethlehem.