

If Gadfly had his way . . .

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Walter Wallace November 11, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the death of Walter Wallace* 

Gadfly is concerned about a Walter Williams “first contact” situation here.

Gadfly feels he has good reason to be concerned.

Walter Williams is the tip of an iceberg going back to Jacob Blake, Rayshard Brooks, George Floyd and beyond to

Gadfly guesses some people will say such an incident is not likely here, we are a good town, we have a good police force, but he also guesses that towns like Kenosha and Ferguson felt that way too.

Gadfly suggests nothing negative about our police department.

He would just like to know how our police department would handle such a “first contact” situation and whether such tragic events have prompted any re-thinking or brand-new thinking relative to such situations.

Gadfly feels that the “first contact” situation is “the” front-burner problem in policing today.

And thus he was frustrated at the way it was, in his opinion, buried at the October 29 Committee of the Whole meeting.

What we learned at that meeting (and rolled out a bit more at the November 9 budget meeting — and Gadfly will get to that meeting in more detail shortly) is that the City, in a pilot program, is reassigning a social worker funded mostly (how much exactly has been left vague) on grant money to handle a variety of mental-health type referrals from police officers. There also will be a freebie intern from Kutztown during the academic year. The idea is to save police time with repeated calls regarding a troubled individual and to cut down on the number of arrests.

All well and good.

But this plan does not relate (directly anyway) to the first contact situation.

Gadfly assumes that a person referred by the police would have to voluntarily comply with interaction with the social worker and with whatever mental health or counseling treatment was appropriate. So there's no guarantee that a referral will avoid a first contact situation.

Even a person who voluntarily complies might “go off” at a some point and create a first contact situation.

And there could be/would be first contact situations with people not previously known to the police.

So Gadfly was not satisfied with our response.

He felt the October 29 meeting was a waste. Everybody who was anybody was in the room. The time was ripe for a good discussion.

But the elephant was not in the room.

With great presumption, he realizes, Gadfly has said he would have run



the October 29 meeting differently.

He would have put this picture up on the Town Hall screen and played [this short video](#) and this [short video](#).

And asked the assembled very directly, “How are our officers trained to handle a situation like this?” “If you agree that there was not a good outcome here for either the subject, or the officers (it must be shattering to kill some one in any circumstance), or the community, how do we avoid such an outcome?”

This is the focused point at which Gadfly would start the discussion with all the players in the room.

And if (when) discussion flagged a bit, he would play a few seconds of [Walter Wallace’s mother screaming](#) over his body.

All along, Gadfly has been puzzled with the City and City Council’s pace and indirection in dealing with the post-GeorgeFloyd reckoning with race, but he is glad to hear that there will be another meeting with the police after the turn of the year to deal with such matters as the first contact response.

But Gadfly found something interesting in his mail bag last week that might relate to the lack of urgency that has frustrated Gadfly.

More on that next.

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