

Gadfly has a “conversation” with LVGNA

The Bethlehem Gadfly | Lehigh Valley Good Neighbors Alliance, Police | November 14, 2020

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

ref: [**Putting the Heat on City Council \(1\)**](#)

ref: [**Putting the Heat on City Council \(2\)**](#)

ref: [**Community Engagement Initiative resolution approved July 7**](#)

ref: [**Has Council succumbed to the heat?**](#)

ref: [**Looking closely at the LVGNA position**](#)

Gadfly finds himself very intrigued by the Lehigh Valley Good Neighbors Alliance. He feels a kind of kinship. They are playing a gadfly kind of role — outsiders with “eyes” on City Council trying to stir awareness in and the participation of the larger community in the workings of City government. And their “Coffee Cup” brochure sure exemplifies Gadfly rule #1 — go to the primary sources. Lots of quotes there and links to the meeting archives for substantiation.

However, Gadfly had a hard time with the style of the two LVGNA documents linked above, and thus what he did in the last post was attempt to parse out what he thought was the skeletal framework of ideas that lay underneath that style.

And he used that skeletal framework to focus some thinking overnight about those ideas. Here’s what he came up with.

- The purpose of that [July 7 Community Engagement Initiative] resolution was to defund the police department, endangering public safety.

That doesn't seem right to Gadfly. There's a link to the resolution above. Gadfly would like to see LVGNA directly connect the dots from the words of the resolution to a defunding purpose. Gadfly is in "show me" mood here. Connect the dots. Moreover — bigger picture — Gadfly doesn't find defunding so scary an idea. In this morning's Call, a columnist says defunding may be the "dumbest political slogan ever." Agreed. What people labeled as defunders are talking about is reimagining how public safety is done. The goal of public safety is keeping all people safe not keeping a certain way of doing public safety in existence forever unchanged. If the current mode of doing public safety isn't keeping all people safe, then it makes sense to seek another mode. Those advocating reimagining how public safety can be done believe the current system isn't keeping all people safe, therefore they seek change. Gadfly sees no problem with that. Gadfly has done some research in cities that have successfully reimagined their public safety structures. These models are not hare-brained. They do not move so quickly as to endanger public safety.

- In creating and passing that resolution, Council listened only to advocates of defunding.

Gadfly doesn't understand this objection. Yes, commentary at the July 7 meeting was one-sided. Gadfly wondered about that at the time. Gadfly was puzzled that the "defenders" of the police (these terms are awkward and imprecise, but we're kind of stuck with them) were not there. But

surely that cannot be Council's fault. Where were members of the "other side"? The meeting was open to the public. Now that lack of balance was surely remedied at the August 11 meeting where defenders outnumbered the re-imaginings. Council heard plenty from the "other side" that night.

- The advocates of defunding who spoke July 7 favored the resolution.

Gadfly finds this point very curious. Gadfly thinks that to a person the "defunder" commenters (again, we're stuck with the terminology) were either dissatisfied with the resolution or dead-set against it. If the purpose of the resolution was to defund, dismantle, etc. the police department, the defunders and dismantlers didn't see it that way!!! How odd!!! Gadfly agrees, though, that the responses from the 4 Councilmembers quoted on the brochure would give the impression that in listening to the defunders, they were agreeing with them. That's why Gadfly has been puzzled by subsequent silence on Council's part and why he was so interested in the LVGNA claim of putting the brakes on Council action.

- Council actively ignored, discredited, suppressed (censored?) opposing views.

This is the distinct impression that Gadfly came away with from the two LVGNA documents. This is an egregious claim or, at the least, insinuation. Badly needs evidence. Again, LVGNA has to connect the dots here.

- The conscious, intended effect of the Community Engagement Initiative is to exclude some people from the community (such as those who oppose defunding the police).

Gadfly's immediate response is that this claim or insinuation by LVGNA is patently absurd — prima facie. The resolution is about "Community Engagement," it's about wide inclusion, and it is done in a so open-ended, passive way that Gadfly has criticized it for being bound to be ineffective. It goes to an extreme to be inclusive. LVGNA could even sponsor a meeting as part of the Community Engagement. Again, Gadfly is in a "show me" mode here. LVGNA needs to connect the dots.

- Council is a monolithic body, 7 people all on the same page, operating in unison as one body.

Gadfly's backing off on the "monolithic" reading he previously made of LVGNA here. He now sees that the brochure does exempt Councilmen Callahan and Colon from the "bad guys." I think LVGNA could have made clearer that they mean a "majority" of Council are "betraying" the City. However, he thinks they do create the impression that the danger to the public stems from the entire Council walking in lock-step with the "defunders." In fact, saddle up, gang, I would expect discussion to be robust if issues or proposals ever get to Council.

- This monolithic Council has a radical political agenda.

Remember, forget the “monolithic.” Council isn’t “monolithic.” Radical political agendas is a “loaded” term, but, in any event, radical political agendas don’t scare Gadfly. But he should have been more specific. He should have asked what LVGNA meant by that term. He guesses at root it might be the eradication of “systemic racism.” LVGNA puts that term in quotes on the their post probably to indicate their belief that systemic racism is a fiction. Gadfly believes in it. And, yes, he would guess that each Council member believes in it too. Systemic racism is obviously a polarizing issue and is too big an issue to tackle here in a few lines, but you know what came to Gadfly’s mind? That moment in one of the early post GeorgeFloyd meetings in which the former Police Chief — a victim of “Cancel Culture” according to LVGNA — rather movingly agreed with Councilman Reynolds that certain people in our culture don’t start from the same spot in life as the Chief and the Councilman did and didn’t benefit from the same advantages they did. That, Gadfly thought, was an honest, touching acknowledgment of systemic racism from a person LVGNA respects.

- Reliable sources, necessarily unnamed, have revealed that the monolithic Council has discussed defunding in secret, perhaps in violation of the Sunshine Laws.

Awww, Gadfly recognizes the need to protect sources — been there, done that — but this is a bit too dramatic for Gadfly. Are 4, maybe 5, god forbid 7, cabal-ing in the basement of Mach’s Gute or somewhere? Judge Judy would call this hearsay.

- LVGNA activists have stopped Council’s police defunding scheme and continue to work to preserve public safety in Bethlehem.

All Gadflies always struggle with humility.

to be continued . . .

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