

# More on the new look in the police department

The Bethlehem Gadfly Police March 5, 2021

 Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police 

## Bethlehem Police Department 2021 Reorganization Chart Public Safety Committee meeting, March 2, 2021

ref: **The Police Department gets a new look**

ref: **Sara K. Satullo, “Bethlehem’s 154-member police force reorganized with new community focus.” [lehighvalleylive.com](http://lehighvalleylive.com), March 4, 2021.**

ref: **Christina Tatu, “Bethlehem Police reorganize to create new community services division.” Morning Call, March 3, 2021.**

*Speaking as a resident*, Gadfly was not all that satisfied with Chief Kott’s presentation of her reorganization plan for the police department at the Public Safety Committee meeting Tuesday, March 2.

*Speaking as a resident*, Gadfly was frustrated by the first 20 minutes or so of the meeting during which Chief Kott read her presentation.

“Over the past several months,” Chief Kott began her presentation, “we have assessed the Department’s allocation of personnel.”

To Gadfly, this is primarily a personnel report. For the bureaucrats. For the beancounters.

Unless Gadfly is mistaken (and he’ll always take a slap upside the head), the report is too much “in the weeds” to be of substantial value *to residents*.

Of course Gadfly is being unreasonably crotchety.

The report, after all, was not meant *for residents*. In fact, it does not appear that *residents* were even considered as an audience for the report. It was not made available for the public to think about beforehand, nor is it yet available to the public as far as he can see as of press time early Thursday night — although Gadfly asked at the meeting that it be done so. There were 40 or so people viewing the livestream of the meeting — a

goodly number. Access to the report beforehand might have generated more public participation.

Anyway, what makes Gadfly crotchety is that when it comes to talk of the police since last June, Gadfly never seems to be hearing what he wants to hear.

Rodney King is 30 years ago almost to the day. Yesterday the U.S. House of Representatives passed the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act. Jury selection for George Floyd starts Monday. Opening arguments are March 29. And we seem to be re-arranging the desks in City Hall.

Here's what Gadfly *the resident* wanted to hear up-front at the get-go:

- the occasion, the rationale for the reorganization (national reckoning on race)
- what the organization is now, and how we are going to differ
- the specific goals of the reorganization (not boilerplate)
- the means to achieve those goals
- an executive summary, a bullet list of takeaways
- what changes will be visible to residents
- benchmarks, metrics for evaluation (as caller Michele suggested)

Instead, for *resident* Gadfly, we went into the weeds. There is a wealth of detail in the report, but that wealth of detail is not of primary interest or value *to the resident* — well, *to this resident*.

In fact, Gadfly wonders how much value the report really was for Council members. They did speak respectfully to the Chief.

But what Gadfly learned of import to him *as a resident* about the Chief's motives and goals came more from Council questions than her presentation.

To wit:

- a long-term goal for the Chief is more officers attending community events

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In this exchange with Councilwoman Negrón, the Chief says she has the opportunity to expand on her long-term goals in restructuring. The trouble for Gadfly is that she has not previously in the presentation clearly articulated her goals, long- or short-term. The long-term goal described here is to increase the number and variety of officers who attend community events. To give the department more faces to the community. The means to achieve that goal is to pair patrol officers and community officers. The established community officers will model community activities for the patrol officers, who are becoming increasingly younger (and therefore moldable) as the force evolves. The community officers will have built rapport with the community, and they will bring the patrol officers in on foot, on bike, out of the cars for face-to-face contact with the community. They will work together, asks Councilwoman Negrón? Yes is the reply. But Gadfly is having a hard time imagining that. Community officers and patrol officers are in different stems of the organizational chart. They do not link laterally. And the Chief's hospital analogy breaks down. After the ER doc has finished, there is normally no contact with the specialty doctor. So how does that pairing (in effect, mentoring) of officers occur? Gadfly does not see that yet.

- the Chief wants to improve communication with the public

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Further in the conversation with Councilwoman Negrón, the Chief indicates that currently the department does not communicate well with the public. "There is no central point person" to handle the communication with the public. Through the restructuring of the leadership positions, "we can do better at getting information out to the media and the community."

- the Chief wants to return to the brand of community policing that involves walking, biking

Councilwoman Crampsie Smith asks if we are "going back to more of this community policing" with this model. The answer is yes. We're trying to mesh two things we *do* really, really well — what we *did* really well in the

past, getting out into the community, walking, biking, forming partnerships (language is not clear, *do* or *did*?) and being proactive in enforcement. This “hybrid blend” capitalizes on what our department has done well. This approach will enable the whole department to engage in that “community policing” philosophy. So does that mean that we will be doing more of the community policing that involves officers walking and biking and out visible in the community more? If so, that sounds like real news to Gadfly. But our local reporters haven’t picked up on that, so maybe Gadfly is misunderstanding.

- the Chief envisions more and more training

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We agree that all officers will get training in such things as mental health and de-escalation, says Councilwoman Crampsie Smith, but now that we are moving to more specialized units, can that mean more in the way of specialized training? The answer is yes, and the Chief envisions that being out in the community, the officers will make relationships and partnerships with subject-matter experts that will increase the number and kind of training topics in which the community can participate.

- the Chief is all-in on the department liaison with the mental health person

All members of the force must interact with the mental health specialist, not just the ones in some community service units.

So Gadfly *the resident* did learn some important things about what the new organization plan aims to achieve.

And maybe if the personnel ducks are in a row, Council and the Department can take a bit deeper view of the Department.

He’s hoping for another Public Safety meeting before long.

Gadfly is hoping that on the May 25th anniversary of the George Floyd episode the department will have much substantive to say about lessons learned.