

“Trust in Mr. Reynolds is misplaced”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Candidates for election, Election May 4, 2021

 Latest in a series of posts on candidates for election 

Barbara Diamond enjoys retirement as Lehigh University Director of Foundation Relations by engaging in various activities and organizations hopefully for the betterment of the community. Her particular interests at the moment are preventing gun violence, local government ethics reform, and Bethlehem Democratic Committee work.

Dear Gadfly:

Regarding **Councilwoman Negron’s post of April 26th** on the status of the ethics ordinance, I would like to make the following points:

Ms. Negron more than anyone deserves credit for launching the effort to pass a comprehensive ethics ordinance. It was her impassioned remarks at the special meeting of **December 8, 2015**, on the Martin Tower rezoning ordinance in which she cited numerous instances of questionable behavior by the administration and council and declared her intention, when she was sworn in a month later, to pass an anti-pay-to=play law. I recommend that anyone who wants to understand why people question Mr. Reynolds’ commitment to ethics reform in Bethlehem go to the city council archives and read the minutes of that meeting, especially the public comments not only by Ms. Negron (pg.13) but also Bruce Haines (pg. 11 & 19), Breena Holland (pg.21), Bill Scheirer (pg. 13), and Dana Grubb (pg. 14).

Although there had been several previous council meetings on the rezoning, the meeting on **December 8, 2015**, was significant because of documents that had been obtained and published in November through a Right to Know request by Bernie O’Hare. The documents revealed extensive developer influence in drafting the ordinance that would effectively rezone the Martin Tower site to allow for massive commercial development. The documents verified significant misrepresentations by the Donchez administration and Councilman Reynolds, who was City Council President at that time. Mr. Reynolds

repeatedly insisted to the public that the developers were not involved, that the ordinance was being brought forward by the administration, and, therefore, that no plan for the Martin Tower site was available for public review.

The public asked Mr. Reynolds and another council member who also received generous campaign donations from the developers multiple times to recuse themselves and questioned the propriety of their voting on a zoning ordinance that would so obviously benefit a developer who had given them significant campaign contributions. Instead of acknowledging the public's concerns, Mr. Reynolds responded that "the idea that there is a conflict here and that anyone can attack the integrity of the member of council is ridiculous. It is also insulting" **(October 6, 2015 Minutes pg.27)**. The Right to Know documents revealed that at the very time Mr. Reynolds was scolding the public for challenging his integrity, the developer of the Martin Tower site, Lewis Ronca, was in the hallway texting to DCED director, Alicia Karner, that he needed to leave before reporters spotted him; his texts expressed his chagrin that the 2 hour 15 minute presentation by Planning Director, Darlene Heller, had not caused more people who patiently awaited their turn to speak to leave the meeting. In addition, the documents revealed that Ronca's assistant, Duane Wagner, provided talking points to Ms. Heller to use when engaging the public, including the myth that the current ordinance allows up to 425,000 sq. ft for retail **(Lehigh Valley Ramblings, November 24, 2015)**.

Many of the people who spoke in opposition not only to the rezoning but also to the revelations of public officials' cozy relationship with the developers and the dishonest way those relationships were presented to the public went on to form the grassroots effort in 2016 to support Councilwoman Negron's aim to pass an ethics ordinance. I recently listened to the audio of Mr. Reynolds' response to the ethics ordinance at the council meeting **(May 17, 2017)** in which he stated that he was angry about the ordinance, mischaracterized it in multiple ways, and described public comment on it as ridiculous and insulting. In fact, Councilwoman Van Wirt mentioned numerous times that it was the disrespect Mr. Reynolds displayed for Ms. Negron and the good faith effort of members of the community that inspired her to run for office. I will also note the maneuver by Mr. Reynolds in his effort to sabotage the

ordinance of having DA Morganelli speak in opposition. Morganelli made over 20 false and misleading statements, which could not be rebutted because his remarks were allowed after Courtesy of the Floor.

Councilwoman Negrón's [recent post to Gadfly](#) asks us to have faith that Councilman/Mayoral candidate Reynolds is now in favor of an ethics ordinance. It is now 2021, Mr. Reynolds was president (2014-18) and a wielder of significant power on council for these past 6 years. If he was truly in favor of an effective ethics ordinance (not the ineffectual, piecemeal training and gift bans they passed, which were mere window dressing), he would have helped Ms. Negrón try to fix the ordinance she proposed or wrote his own ordinance relevant to city contracts, which he expressed an interest in while chastising her efforts way back in 2015. I note also that Councilwoman Negrón is speaking for Mr. Reynolds. Her effort to take blame for Reynolds' bad behavior does not undo my own observation since 2015 of Mr. Reynolds' bias toward special interests like developers.

In view of the above, I believe trust in Mr. Reynolds is misplaced.

Barbara