

# The Zoning Board controversy: part 1

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Serious Issues August 23, 2019

*(The latest in a series of posts on City government)*

There was an hour of “New Business” at the City Council meeting Tuesday August 20 — the last hour of the meeting.

See “[Zoning Hearing Board appointment withdrawn, Council discussion ensues](#)” or [the City web site](#) for audio and video.

Councilman Callahan was upset that fellow Councilpersons objected to one of the two people nominated to the Zoning Hearing Board, causing the Mayor to withdraw the nominations.

Let’s call that person Nominee1.

Nominee1 is currently an alternate member of the ZHB, having served in that position about a year.

And before we go on, let’s remember a few basics.

City Council has three primary roles and responsibilities: approving legislation, approving the budget, approving members of the many Authorities, Boards, and Commissions (the ABCs) that do the important work of the City.

The Mayor nominates members of the ABCs; City Council approves or disapproves them.

The Zoning Hearing Board is not only one of the ABCs; it is one of what Gadfly calls the “hot-button” ABCs, one of those whose cases can be high profile, whose subject matter can be high impact, and whose decisions can be controversial.

If you are unsure what a Zoning Hearing Board does, Gadfly has just taken several posts to describe a hearing in detail. See “[Bethlehem Manor](#)” under topics on the Gadfly sidebar.

And the entire hearing is on video at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfqPco2DAVo>

The Zoning Hearing Board is a “quasi-judicial” body. Witnesses are sworn in, testimony must be the truth, so help you God. A court recorder takes down all testimony and produces an official transcript. Board deliberations are done “off-the-record” and sometimes literally out of view of the public. Appeals from ZHB decisions go to Northampton County Court.

Councilman Callahan (BC) was “very disappointed by the actions of Councilman Reynolds (JWR), Councilwoman Negrón (ON), and Councilwoman Van Wirt (PVW) for their lack of support and the pulling of the name of the highly qualified and ethical candidate for the Zoning Board for no other reason than a couple of perfectly legal campaign donations for her Council race.”

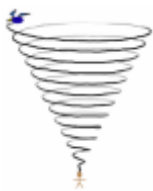
Nominee1 ran unsuccessfully for City Council in the recent May primary.

Councilman Colon (MC) indicated he was prepared to support Nominee1, and President Waldron (AW) moderated the discussion and did not express a preference.

With 3 people slated to vote “no,” Nominee1 would have failed if there were a vote (there being only 6 Council members because of Shawn Martell’s resignation).

So the Mayor withdrew the nominations.

Justification or lack of it for Nominee1’s denial, then, is where the discussion started.



But the structure of the discussion was more like a widening gyre (anyone recognize the literary allusion?) than a linear progression, moving up and away but still always connected to the original issue.

One of the goals of the Gadfly project is to help you know your City officials better, so you will have a better idea whom to vote or not vote for when the time comes. Before he became a Gadfly, Gadfly never felt he had enough information at voting time to make a truly responsible choice.

So Gadfly feels that it worthwhile to examine this section of the Council meeting in some detail.

We will learn something about our elected officials.