

# Councilman Callahan's response to the proposed South Bethlehem Planning Study

The Bethlehem Gadfly Ethics, Neighborhoods, Serious Issues, Southside November 7, 2019

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Southside* 

**City Council meeting, Nov 6, 2019, part 2**

**mins. 1:01:22 – 1:30:35**

The recommendation of the contract for the South Bethlehem Planning Study came to Council in a memo from the head of the Department of Community and Economic Development.

Councilman Callahan asked the City Planning Director to come to the podium.

BC did not want Council to authorize \$25,000 for the study without Council doing “due diligence,” that is, assuring themselves by first reviewing past studies of the Southside that this new study would not duplicate work that was already done.

He wanted data that would presumably result in a proposal of narrower/cheaper scope.

BC asked the PD if she could forward past studies of the Southside to Council for such review in time for final action on the proposal by Council at its next meeting.

*(The Comprehensive Plan, the Speck report, and others are readily available on the City web site where Gadfly has often consulted them,*

*and one would assume that any new Councilperson would think of them as first-term homework.)*

BC made that request several times during the conversation, affirming that his intention was not to block the proposal.

And he eventually made a motion to postpone consideration of this proposal till the November 19 meeting.

The motion to postpone was defeated 5-2, Councilwoman Crampsie Smith joining BC.

Let's look at what was behind BC's action.

It took a while for the real reason to come out, and it came out in a startling and, Gadfly believes, quite disconcerting way. See if you agree.

BC wondered — since there were only 3 (2?) new developments on the Southside (Five10 Flats, Polk Street Garage) since the past studies — what changes warranted a new study.

Why was a new study necessary?

He was concerned about:

- whether historical structures would be added
- whether the historic district would be expanded
- whether there would be changes in zoning mapping
- whether there would be changes in height limits
- whether there would be limits to demolition
- who would be deciding about any proposed changes

The cumulative effect of these concerns seemed to indicate to Gadfly that BC — an unabashed proponent of and friend of development — was worried about restrictions to development.

Go to [min. 1:26:40](#).

This root cause of his concern gradually came directly out into the open after the defeat of his motion to postpone:

- when he asked who will be making up the study committee
- when he kind of demanded to be on the committee
- when he indicated uncertainty over who the next Mayor will be
- when he reminded us of “garbage in, garbage out”
- when he worried about influences on and pressure on entities voting on Requests for Proposals
- when he revealed a personal discussion with the Mayor
- when he admitted a “big concern” with where this study was going with the Head of DECD “at the helm”
- when he referred to “highly unethical” behavior by the Head of DECD with members of the Parking Authority
- when he stated that people in Allentown went to jail “for behavior like that”
- when he boldly and directly asked the Head of DECD (who was in the audience) — “did you, or did you not?” — whether she did such behavior
- when he registered uncertainty about where this study was going
- when he expressed discomfort with the Head of DECD and some things done lately

This crescendo of concern climaxes in, ironically, BC bringing up “one of things I’m not going to bring up right now.” Why? “Because I have asked the Mayor for an investigation.”

Gasp. Huh?

Left field heard from.

All of this — what President Waldron called “dirty laundry” — in service of BC’s bottom line request that a Council member be on the study committee.

*“All I’m asking for is that we have Council representation on that committee.”*

Such a simple request.

Gadfly doesn’t understand BC sometimes.

Why did he take that route to get from there to here?

Wasn’t it likely, reasonable that the Mayor would ask a Council member to serve on such an important committee?

Ok, If not reasonable and likely, and if BC has legitimate concerns about the working of the committee, could not BC have just asked that it be so?

Instead of kind of going to war and needlessly shadowing a City administrator’s character in the process?

Now “we” are all left imagining dark deeds.

Gadfly often says that a reason to pay attention is so that you will be the most informed voter you can be next time ’round.

This is one of those instances.