

A Public Safety Committee meeting medley

The Bethlehem Gadfly Police August 23, 2020

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

*Good conversation builds community.
The Gadfly*

The 25+ residents who called in to the Public Safety Committee meeting August 11 provide a reasonable pool of the varied community voices on the general subject of defunding or otherwise altering our policing structure.

Gadfly has presented audio and print records of their commentary in full (always go to the primary source, right?) and paired them in “conversation” with a counterpart to sharpen the divergent perspectives.

Trying to help you understand. Trying to help you think.

Another way of understanding commenter views is this collection of soundbites from their commentary that you see below.

Gadfly suggests that each item on these lists could be a fruitful conversation starter. “We need a city budget that is in line with our priorities,” for instance, might lead us to ask each other what the primary purpose of government is. Someone might answer “keep the peace,” and someone else might jump in and say, “Yes, but . . . “ – and an interesting conversation about budgets as moral documents might ensue in which everybody might be enlightened.

We are trying to get a better idea of each other’s positions as we move toward what will no doubt be some policy proposals by City Council and the City Administration.

And we should be trying to influence those Councilors and Administrators who may be direct or indirect readers of this blog.

Gadfly invites you to favor us with your perspective on the collective voice of each position or to “run” with ideas generated by one or more of these soundbites.

Which “side” are you on? Do you agree with everything on your side?
What do you agree with on the other side, what most disagree with?
Which soundbite jumps out at you?

For defunding

Those who spoke for defunding said such things as:

My identity as a straight white 60-something woman means I receive more respect and hold more privilege than any in my South Bethlehem neighborhood when it comes to potential interactions with police.

What if we worked to recruit to really raise our own folks to become our police department?

My wife’s skin color is not a threat.

To normalize the fact that we are talking about brutalizing a human being as a method of de-escalation is just really not acceptable and alarming.

I am not anti-police. I am pro-Bethlehem. I am pro my community.

As an Hispanic male, the answers that were given about the disparities in the use of force were wholly inadequate.

Encounters with police are traumatizing even when they don’t end with injury or death.

Let’s just point out that something’s broken in the system in Bethlehem.

When we say defund the police, we say don’t fund them to respond to those calls — pay social workers, pay mental health professionals.

This didn’t start with George Floyd.

Introducing members of the community with health issues into the criminal justice system is not helping them.

Tolerating racism in any form is racist.

Let's really talk about the people this is really affecting and that we are showing up here for. It's not us, it's for the people who can't be here tonight. Our black and brown neighbors.

When we say defund the police, it's we want to fund appropriate response.

You should not be normalizing these kinds of behaviors.

We're saying we need to think about what other people's experience with police has been like.

The data bears out that POC are having more police encounters, are having more use of force directed at them.

The system is not working. The Latinx community is not reporting to the police.

We need a city budget that is in line with our priorities.

Against defunding

Those who spoke against defunding said such things as:

Black Lives Matter Inc . . . is at its core a Marxist organization, admittedly led by trained Marxists.

There are 18,000 police departments in the United States. There were 13 or 14 unarmed Blacks killed in 2019 by police. That doesn't sound systemic.

Your meeting is full of professors who live in ivory towers. I don't think these people understand what it means to be the victim of a crime.

Everybody I spoke to does not want any defunding; if anything, they want to add more funding for the best training.

I'm proud to be a citizen of Bethlehem and proud to have the Bethlehem police.

Using the hammer/nail analogy, if you assume there is systemic racism, then everything will be caused by systemic racism.

What if any are the stakeholder qualifications of the radical activists that have caught your attention?

I don't know what more you can ask from our Chief and our police department.

It saddens me to think that the unconscionable actions of a few have cast a pall on so many dedicated and honorable police officers.

Any ideas of disbanding or defunding are appalling to me.

Would an organization whose goal is empowering Black citizens trash and burn its Black communities to the ground?

I think we have one of the best police departments in the state. I will go as far as saying we have one of the best police departments in the country.

Maybe we need to examine our own implicit and explicit biases.

The overthrow of our government is the goal. . . .There is no appeasing radicals.

I feel that some of the questions posed by Council seemed like a fishing expedition for bad behavior when there was none.

I am just really disgusted with these people who are calling in and attacking our police department.

Who's going to protect the lives of our children of our community if we abolish or defund the police department?

There is no such thing as defunding, dismantling, abolishing the police department. These people are insane. They need to go somewhere and live in Minneapolis where all this stuff is happening.

Maybe we need to expand our views beyond our local criminologist.

Over the past 10 years Bethlehem Police officers have definitely saved hundreds of lives, probably many more.

A lot of people may say that abolishing the police department is different than defunding it, but make no mistake, the goal is to eliminate the police department.

I ask you who will stop the rape or death of your loved ones if we abolish or defund police departments.

I am very proud of the police department and think that being nationally accredited and accredited by the state shows how far ahead we are as a city.

You have to remember that if people don't comply, then use of force is going to be used.

I was impressed by the very low numbers of the use of force.

I love our police department, I respect the police department.

The Bethlehem Gadfly