

Good conversation builds community, and . . .

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police August 26, 2020

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

. . . and bad conversation destroys community.

That's the way it goes with language.

We've had bad conversation on all sides.

A caller at the August 11 Public Safety meeting reminded us that a defunding partisan said, "we don't need to hear from any more white people." That kind of talk gets us nowhere.

A defender of the police called defunders "insane." That's insane. In what universe does that help to solve problems.

A defender suggested that residents might need to pass a stakeholder test before claiming the right to speak on the issue of police/community relations. Echoes of the poll test before voting. A silencing tactic. Anti-democratic.

A defender suggested that defunders might find another city in which to live. America, love it or leave it. Bethlehem, love it as is, or leave it. A particularly nasty trope. Anti-democratic.

A businessperson on Main St. with years of good relations with the police argued against defunding as if her experience was the only one that counted. Remember empathy.

A defender asked who will safeguard you from the death of your loved ones if we defund police departments seemingly without realizing that defunders were reacting to the injury and death to their loved ones at the hands of the police. Whose loved ones count the most?

Out of nowhere at the end of a recent City Council meeting, one Councilperson asked another Councilperson a question whose only purpose Gadfly could discern was to cause trouble — and not the John

Lewis variety of “good trouble.” Of course, Gadfly could be wrong. But Council dissension is the last thing we need.

Both defunders and defenders threaten political retribution. Vote my way, or we’ll vote you out of office. Gadfly is not always sure that elected officials are strong enough to withstand such threats. Perhaps naively, he hopes that arguments can be made without such threats. Make your case. Persuade. Don’t bully.

“We need to heal,” we just heard Julia Jackson say.

Let’s avoid the incendiary and inflammatory and insensitive.

And remember that good conversation can build community.