

What more could the Chief have done?

The Bethlehem Gadfly Marijuana, Police July 1, 2020

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

It looked like that March 3 Public Safety Committee meeting was going to end with the police department and City Council butting heads.

The Chief said he issued directives on the 2018 marijuana ordinance, spoke at roll calls, spoke at platoon meetings, and etc., and felt that there was nothing more he could do to change officer minds, to make the numbers tell a different story.

But there was obvious sentiment from Councilfolk Reynolds, Van Wirt, and Waldron in particular that the Chief was the crux of the problem and that there was more that he could do as leader of the department.

What would that “more” be?

What if something like this happens in the future as we get into discussing the use-of-force directives and the Community Engagement Initiative?

There may come a time when we need to change officer minds.

What would we do?

We’d better be prepared.

Councilman Reynolds obliquely mentioned “tools” that the Chief might have.

To what was he referring?

Gadfly started to think of an analogous situation in his professional life.

The Freshman English (First-Year English) course at Lehigh U was a required course. It had about 40 sections. It had multiple teachers. Those teachers varied in their grading policies. Students were arbitrarily

slotted into a section by the Registrar based on holes in their schedule. Students had no choice of section, thus no choice of grading standards.

How to be fair in such an arbitrary system, how to be fair to all students?

At one point in department history, we had “grading sessions.” All of us teachers would read the same student essay, give it a grade, then discuss how we arrived at that grade, trying to arrive at a consensus on the grade, on our standards.

Gadfly can vividly remember such a session in which the prof leading it spoke of a student essay that had been given an “A” as “the kind of writing that would make a yak wince”!

He was not very diplomatic.

Who can forget such articulation of the need to come together to arrive at some common standards to insure fairness for our students.

Was this called “norming”?

These sessions could be brutal. I remember being incensed as a full-of-piss-and-vinegar young Assistant Professor. Nobody was going to tell me what to do in my classroom, no sir. I mellowed.

But there was a need for fairness. And a need for our group to understand the need for balance between our independence and the good of the wider community.

And the way we did it was to come together and talk.

Can one imagine a group of police officers being presented with a scenario involving a small amount of marijuana — such as a traffic stop — and talking about what statute would be applied and why?

Perhaps these could be actual police reports with identifying data redacted.

The goal would not be to force behavior but to have peers work together to shape common standards.