

Allentown Council discusses the resolution regarding the police department (1)

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police July 31, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts responding to the George Floyd killing* 

Allentown City Council meeting July 29, 2020, video

mins. 56:00 – 1:06:00 and 1:17:25 – 2:24:40

Bethlehem has now formally announced the August 11 **Public Safety Committee** meeting, and we are taking advantage of the fact that Allentown is in a sense a step ahead of us — their City Council having had a meeting this week with the Police Chief — to see how they are handling a resolution regarding the department.

The Allentown meeting Wednesday night (and on the video you can hear protestors banging on the exterior of the building) was a Committee of the Whole meeting to discuss a Gerlach/Siegel resolution at which no vote was taken.

Find the resolution [here](#).

We have posted about the public comment before the meeting [here](#).

Now we are ready to listen to the discussion among the Councilors and the Police Chief.

We'll break that listening into two posts, holding off focus on the defunding part of the resolution to the next post.

First, let Gadfly say that the discussion, while robust, was — except for the defunding section that we'll look at in the next post — was low-key and cordial.

Councilwoman Gerlach started discussion of the resolution by saying that it was not anti-cop, that, though the final clause about divesting and defunding was surely to captivate attention (and we'll get to that in the next post), the resolution was 90% about accountability and transparency **(mins 56:00 – 1:08:30)**.

She broke the several bullets/clauses in the resolution into 4 parts:

- reporting: communication between the police, council, and the public
- the use of force
- transparency, community participation
- divestment and defunding

The Mayor and the Police Chief then took about 10 minutes for general context and background **(mins. 1:06:00 – 1:17:25)** before the Council president gradually settled into the format of working in order down the list of bullets/clauses in the resolution to get an idea which ones might be disposed of and which would need further discussion **(mins. 1:17:25 – 2:24:40)**. So if you are interested in discussion on a particular item, use the bullets in the resolution as a chronological table of contents, and you should be able to find it easily in this section of the video.

Gadfly can give you the highlights:

Overall, we learned that much in the resolution was already being done or couldn't be done (more on that below).

The Chief readily agreed that resolution requests for reports/statistics can be accommodated.

The Chief agreed with the first bullet about mandating body cam use.

The stop and frisk bullet (e. g. racial profiling) got extended discussion.

The Councilwoman looked for stronger language (in effect, certain immediately fire-able offenses) and more explicitness (racism, sexism, etc.) in directives on discipline, which occasioned discussion of officer rights.

The Chief saw difficulties with a civilian review board but was open to a citizen advisory group.

Several bullets (for instance, removing exceptions for choke holds) ran into the wall of state regulations. The local level is limited and cannot supersede state regulations. Discussion on this issue of jurisdiction resulted in a desire by the proposers to keep these items in the resolution but to use the resolution as the opportunity to advocate for change at the state level.

Overall, the discussion seemed to establish which items in the resolution needed more thinking than others before and at the next meeting.

Gadfly certainly encourages you to listen in here not only for discussion of topics that we will probably take up as well but also for the positive general tone and demeanor of all the Council members and the Chief.

Now on to the toughest nut of all in the next post: divestment and defunding.