


Councilman Reynolds on the Community Engagement Initiative: looking at the ways that we as a community can end systemic racism and create an equitable city

The Bethlehem Gadfly Community Engagement Initiative August 18, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on the Community Engagement Initiative* 

Councilman Reynolds at the Public Safety Committee meeting August 11 lays out his vision of the Community Engagement Initiative: the goal is working toward ending systemic racism and creating an equitable city through two types of meetings, one run by the City, the other by diverse community groups.

Councilman Reynolds is at his rousing best here. Worth listening and catching his energy and enthusiasm.

“That was beautiful,” said Councilwoman Negrón, “you get it!”

Community engagement is of course, of course synonymous with Gadfly’s mission.

The Reynolds/Crampsie Smith Community Engagement Initiative is audaciously ambitious.

Catch the wave!

Audio player not available in this archive

Community Engagement Initiative is not just about our police department. It’s about something much bigger than that.

- People have different experiences based on their race.
- A lot of the justified anger and frustration . . . has arisen because many Americans and people in positions of authority do not understand those different experiences.
- Black Lives Matter . . . acknowledges that opportunities in this country have been historically unequal.

- Correcting those inequities on a structural level is one of the basic tenets of the idea of social justice.
- Social justice is not just about policing.
- [the 1-10 analogy, min. 1:28]
- We can't have the conversation about #10 [the police] without having a conversation about #'s 1-9.
- That's what the Community Engagement Initiative is about.
- This does not mean not having a police department.
- It means understanding that systemic racism exists.
- The CEI is about 1 through 10.
- [JWR's students at Allen High School]
- Their experiences with the institutions that we on City Council personally trust so much . . . they don't have those same experiences.
- Systemic issues . . . a priority for me and proposals I have brought forward . . .
- Systemic racism is real.
- [Everybody] should care about these other areas [the 1-9].
- The Community Engagement Initiative is not about our police department; it is about a different kind of conversation and looking at the ways that we as a community can end systemic racism and create an equitable city.
- . . . difficult to change things quickly . . . challenge to come up with a plan . . .
- The Community Engagement Initiative is designed to create a vehicle through which change can be discussed and created by a community by listening to voices that traditionally have not had a seat at the table.
- There can be two types of meetings, one type of meeting could be run by the City of Bethlehem similar to . . .



- The second type of meeting, though, could and needs to be run by organizations and groups in our community . . . [schools, churches, social justice organizations]
- It is important that City Hall or Council doesn't control all of these meetings.
- The goal of these meetings could be letting people share their experiences . . . whatever organizers of the meetings want.
- The decentralized nature of organizing these meetings by design requires the host organization to set the agenda, control questions, etc.
- The City can hopefully help to spread the word on these meetings, space on web site, etc.
- Important that we allow organizations and groups the ability to create their own groups and the conversation [schools, churches, Boy's Club, New Bethany, etc.].
- Why do we need to have these meetings? Because it's clear . . . that we need to hear from our residents and we need to hear what we as a city and a community need to do better.
- How will we be held accountable for what comes up at these meetings? How will we see progress? . . . by what we say and what we do with the conversations and the discussion.
- I think we do have an opportunity in the coming weeks and months to make tangible progress on ending systemic racism and creating more equitable systems.
- I think we can change a lot of things in our city for the better.
- The chance of us making progress, though, will come down to how many people in our community and in positions of authority believe, and are willing to say that they believe, systemic racism is real, that they believe that black and brown lives matter, and that they believe that it's our responsibility, including anyone in society that has authority, to listen and fix these systems that cause so much damage and pain.
- I do think that we can be doing much more.

