



A vision of Bethlehem as anti-racist city

The Bethlehem Gadfly Community Engagement Initiative September 15, 2020

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

In his comments during the August 11 Public Safety Committee meeting, Councilman Reynolds enunciated a powerfully moving vision for the City:

“The Community Engagement Initiative is [about] looking at the ways that we as a community can end systemic racism and create an equitable city.”

Gadfly isn't sure anyone has remarked on that vision. It was perhaps easy to miss in Councilman Reynolds' characteristically passionate machine-gun delivery. Or maybe we have become cynical about big ideas. But it hit him smack in his Idealism gland. He feels it should have been the headline in the August 12 local media.

Just think about it.

A goal of ending systemic racism and creating an equitable city.

A vision of Bethlehem as anti-racist city.

It makes Gadfly's loins leap.

It made Gadfly call the Reynolds/Crampsie Smith resolution that includes the Community Engagement Initiative “audaciously ambitious.”

The murder of George Floyd was tragic, horrendous.

But it tapped our conscience, and triggered (yet another) national reckoning with race, triggered (yet another) attempt to deal with “America's original sin.”

And it put a fire in Councilman Reynolds' belly.

Take 5 mins, 16 seconds and listen to the Councilman **at the June 3 City Council meeting**, the first one after George Floyd's death

Audio Player not available in this archive

I think that the fact that everybody in this country just about agrees that what happened to George Floyd was horrific, it was a tragedy, it was an injustice unlike what we have seen on camera for a long, long time.

- But there's also a difference between not doing something wrong and doing what's right. And I think that's part of the conversation we need to have in the city.
- we need to start with the understanding that we don't have the same experience in this country based on our skin color. We don't. And I think as a government we need to be creating institutions that are equitable and fair.
- It's just not enough to be against racism, but we need to pro-actively be anti-racist.
- It is not enough just to say what happened in Minnesota is wrong. It is not even enough just to say that we can have peaceful demonstrations here. It's gonna be enough when people that are in marginalized communities are able to look at us as our elected officials and look at things we've done and say, you know what, they made things better.
- It falls on every public institution, every governmental institution to make sure that we understand both the history, the pain, the anger, the frustration, and we need to be committed to creating better, fairer institutions that are equitable and that our citizens can look at and say that they believe them.

It is this dynamic vision of Bethlehem as an anti-racist city that fuels Gadfly's impatience that you have seen him express lately.

Things seem to be going too slow for him.

Enough of the thinking that we should be totally in listening mode, that change is slow and incremental, that Bethlehem can't change the world.

Gadfly thinks often of this line from the [comment by Anna Smith](#) at the August 11 Public Safety meeting — one of the best of the lot, Gadfly feels —

“We are at an important moment in our community’s history, and we have an opportunity to do something truly momentous.”

Let’s get to it.

Regarding the difference between being not racist and being anti-racist, Gadfly refers you to the [wonderful short video](#) we watched a week or two back.

The Bethlehem Gadfly