

Gadfly council forum #6: the George Floyd anniversary

[The Bethlehem Gadfly Forum](#), [Gadfly Forum](#) April 26, 2021

 Latest in a series of posts on the Gadfly Forum 

The Council candidates comparison chart

Candidates: Callahan, Crampsie Smith, Kwiatek, Leon, Wilhelm

(Note: the prompt was assigned before the Chauvin verdict, the responses were done after.)

“We must commit and recommit to creating that safe, inclusive, and just place—on all the days, any day, every day.”
Kiera Wilhelm

“To imagine that Bethlehem is somehow different than every other place in this country where we’ve seen these things happen is, I believe, naive. . . . I think we can be an actively anti-racist city. . . . We need to do the work to understand and recognize white privilege . . . so that all of our residents, Black, Indigenous, People of Color, can feel a true sense of belonging in Bethlehem and walk without fear in our community.”
Hillary Kwiatek

The prompts don’t get any easier as the finish line approaches.

The prompt:

The Chauvin jury has just started to deliberate as I write this. We look for an “end” soon. Maybe even before all the candidate responses get published.

We look for an end, but whatever the outcome, there will not be “closure.”

Floyd's death is of too great significance for that. The waves will ripple out for years.

Gadfly gave the candidates, mayoral and council candidates alike, a scenario.

George Floyd died May 25, 2020. The one-year anniversary is approaching. An anniversary that will be marked around the country. One can imagine it a day of speeches and ceremonies.

My basic prompt question was should there be an anniversary response at the City Council meeting of May 19 or June 2?

If so, what; if not, why not?

The Floyd death triggered a national reckoning with race and a reimagining of the way we do public safety.

The Floyd death challenged us to be anti-racist.

What have we done? Have we done enough?

The mayor and Police Chief made speeches on the heels of the Floyd murder. A City Council meeting overflowed with heated resident commentators brimming with ideas. A sensitive political climate caused the Police Chief to bite the dust. We resolved to initiate community engagement. We partnered with the NAACP on a Community Advisory Board. We piloted a program with the Health Bureau. We reorganized the police department.

How has what we have done gone? Have we done enough? Do we plan to do more?

Should we pause and take stock of our response to Floyd's death or not?

Do we owe residents some sense of how we have used that year in which we have all been challenged to work seriously on some of the most deeply rooted problems in our society?

Have we done enough?

Or will we simply let the anniversary slide by in silence?

Big open field again for the candidates to play in.

But looking for big ideas.

If you want to listen to my full prompt, click [here](#).

Kiera Wilhelm

This week's prompt asked, "Should we do something around the year anniversary of the George Floyd killing?" In short, yes. Yes. (Ed, I'm sending this post to you on the evening of April 20, 2021—the day that Derek Chauvin's guilty verdict has been issued. I'm overwhelmed, as so many of us are, and I admit that language is feeling somehow insufficient.)

Almost a year ago, the City committed via the Community Engagement Initiative to act against the foundations of systemic, historic, deep-seated biases that underlie the everyday lives of people of color. Addressing these biases demands, and deserves, our attention.

The resolution is a clear call to action. It strongly states the need to "build bridges and trust," to "work collaboratively and self-reflectively to improve the relationship between our Police Department and our diverse ethnic and racial communities," and to "create a consistent, public space for the long-term discussion of issues surrounding systemic racism, discrimination, race-based inequities, social justice, mental health, addiction, poverty eradication, inclusionary housing, education, and fair policing practices." It expresses a genuine intent to do more, do better. One year later, how have we done? Have we made progress?

Anniversaries help us to remember. And so as we approach this terrible anniversary, we must remember George Floyd. And Breonna Taylor, and Elijah McClain, and Ahmaud Arbery, and Daunte Wright, and all those who came before George Floyd and those who have come since. And we must honor their memories by *continuing to act*. As a City, we have rightly committed to doing all we can to create a safe, inclusive, and just

place for every resident of Bethlehem. Should we do something around the year anniversary of the George Floyd killing? Yes. But not *only* on the year anniversary. We must commit and recommit to creating that safe, inclusive, and just place—on all the days, any day, every day.

Hillary Kwiatek

Bryan Callahan

Rachel Leon

Grace Crampsie Smith

Residents are welcome to fashion reflections on candidate comments, sending them to ejg1@lehigh.edu. On Gadfly we seek the good conversation that builds community, so please be courteous at all times. Gadfly retains the right to abridge and to edit your reflections and to decline posts that are repetitive or that contain personal attacks. Gadfly will publish resident reflections on the week's Forum at noon on Friday.

The Bethlehem Gadfly