

“City Council should have some ways to influence the conversation” with the Parking Authority

The Bethlehem Gadfly Parking, Serious Issues October 22, 2019

 134th in a series of posts on parking 

So here we are again.

Councilwoman Van Wirt, as we have detailed in [earlier posts in this thread](#), has a new idea about how the City does parking that she feels will be beneficial to the residents and the merchants.

Whether you like her idea or not is not the point here.

Whether you think the idea a good one or not is not the point here.

The point here is that City Council and the Bethlehem Parking Authority don't seem to have a way to talk to each other.

Authorities are “independent.”

Council does not have control, especially budget control.

He or she who controls the purse strings, they say, calls the shots.

But here the Mayor controls the meters, Council the fines, and the BPA the garages.

Awkwardly divided power and responsibility in what should be unified and seamless.

One Council member seems to accept this awkward structure: Callahan.

Three others either accept it or at least have not offered an opinion one way or the other: Waldron, Crampsie Smith, Colon.

(Gadfly has a memory that he can't document right now of President Waldron perceptively explaining that the "push back" from some members of Council over the fine structure stems partly from lack of occasions for Council to "weigh in" on parking policies. Gadfly hopes he is remembering correctly, for that is the point he is making here. Apologies if he is mistaken about President Waldron.)

Three members, such as at the last Council meeting, have seen a problem in the structure: Van Wirt, Reynolds, Negron.

Gadfly has amateurishly cobbled several clips together to highlight this last group.

<https://youtu.be/WxFy9nqYKXs>

- Councilman Callahan outlines the structure: the Mayor controls meters, Council fines, and the Bethlehem Parking Authority the garages.
- Councilwoman Van Wirt speaks of having a "dialogue" now between Council and the BPA consonant with Council's "role" in doing what's best for the City, rather than "hoping" the BPA would take up her issue at some future time.
- Councilman Reynolds notes the awkward way "the system is designed" and agrees with PVW that "City Council should have some ways to influence the conversation."
- Councilwoman Negron wishes "that we could reconsider the structure that we have" that's "causing a stretch that shouldn't be."

Councilwoman Van Wirt is left to wait for an invitation from the BPA to bring her ideas to a Board meeting. She has not been invited to

tomorrow's meeting, and, as far as Gadfly knows, she has heard nothing from BPA.

Gadfly wonders three things:

1) why Councilman Callahan, who is Council "liaison" to the BPA, doesn't see it as his role to engage the kind of meeting in which PVW and other interested Council members could trade ideas.

2) why Council doesn't invite the BPA to City Council meetings twice a year for an open dialogue and discussion as Gadfly outlined in a "modest proposal."

3) most radical of all, why doesn't Council "reconsider the structure," as Councilwoman Negrón suggested, for according to Gadfly's researches, Council delegation of meter power to the Mayor under the "Calvo Plan" in 1988-1989 was not on some sacred principle of checks and balances and in that act of delegation not including the fines seems an oversight.

The Strange Separation

The Timeline of the Strange Separation

In other words to correct the problem here, Council should rescind its delegation of meter responsibility. Gadfly, speaking from a basis of absolutely no legal knowledge (Ha!), assumes what Council has done, it can undo.

The goal of this most radical proposal would be to return ultimate power over an area so crucial to the quality of urban life as parking to the highest body in the City and, perhaps most importantly, an elected body directly answerable to the residents.

Right now the BPA is not directly responsible to residents.

Right now the BPA is not even directly responsible to Council.

Gadfly is certain there are downsides to the radical proposal even if legally possible, but it's a conversation that he would like to see.

Gadfly sees good people struggling with a broken system that they know is broken and would like to see them try to fix it — for the good of us all.