

Police chaperone fee when alcohol is served is questioned

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Police December 21, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on City Government* 

Another issue involving the police, marginally, was also raised at the December 15 City Council meeting.

A City policy requiring a police officer present at events on City property at which alcohol is served is apparently under review.

The cost is \$50/hr. for an officer to be present.

The crux of the issue is the financial impact on non-profits.

Mary Toulouse spoke against the policy on behalf of the Mt. Airy Neighborhood Association/Rose Garden Farmers Market, and Jp Jordan and Christopher Schorr spoke against the policy on behalf of Touchstone Theatre.

For Ms. Toulouse, the issue was a vendor (and a Bethlehem merchant at that) at the Farmers Market selling alcohol for home consumption, not at the market. The cost for a policeman would have been \$200 per Saturday for 20 weeks . Ms. Toulouse ultimately argued successfully with the City for an exemption this year, but it sounded like she might have to argue similarly next year, and, in any event, she felt “threatened” by the police in her interaction over the fee. Ms. Toulouse spoke against the policy both for herself and other groups in similar situations.

The issue for Touchstone was selling alcohol at events for consumption there. Mr. Jordan described the different situation elsewhere in cities at which the theater troupe performed and suggested it might be a “cultural issue” here in Bethlehem (close to being a sin tax). Mr. Schorr argued the difference between a large entrepreneur who sold alcohol at events to make money, and to whom hiring a policeman was an acceptable cost of doing business, and the cost to a non-profit simply trying to make expenses and for whom a policeman might account for 50% of the profits. *Au contraire*, said Mr. Schorr, the City should be trying to “incentivize” the non-profits.

Neither the reason for the policy nor its duration (a remnant of Pa. blue laws?) was given, so it’s hard for Gadfly to judge the merits of the policy, but Gadfly can tell you the three residents made good sense.

One more thing, though, that intersects with wider police discussions.

Ms. Toulouse remembered a time of community policing that West Side neighbors still remember positively and fondly — nostalgia for a neighborhood beat officer they all knew and — speaking to the issue at hand — one who could visit the Farmers Market in the due course of his or her beat work. Councilwoman Negron gave this idea legs as well.

Gadfly has heard others — he thinks especially of resident Lisa Rosa — who speak fondly of this past successful version of community policing and urge its return. Such comments always confuse Gadfly since the department describes itself as already doing “community policing” on the [City web site](#): “The Bethlehem Police Department is structured using the community policing philosophy and is committed to community and police partnership. The department structure has three

divisions: Patrol, Criminal Investigations and Professional Standards.”



There's confusion somewhere.

There must be different definitions of community policing.

Gadfly's thinking on this subject is no doubt influenced by his Norman Rockwell image of the idyllic small town with its friendly police, but he must admit that he would like to see this form of community policing discussed in the promised meetings early in the new year.

Mary Toulouse (8 mins.):

Audio Player

Jp Jordan (5 mins.):

Christopher Schorr (5 mins.):

The Bethlehem Gadfly