

Council Candidates – 4-year seat – Question 1 (16)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Candidates for election, Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues March 29, 2019
(16th in a series of posts on candidates for election)

There are 5 candidates for the 3 openings for a 4-year position on City Council: Michael Colon, J. William Reynolds, Carol Ritter, David Saltzer, Paige Van Wirt.

Gadfly's purpose is not to endorse candidates but to provide information. Gadfly will pose a few questions (prompts) for the candidates to answer in succession in the period before the election on May 21.

Gadfly followers are welcome to suggest future questions.

A tip o' the hat and a wave of the wings to the candidates for their commitment and courage in running for office and for participating in this Gadfly attempt to help us all be more informed voters.

The first question Gadfly posed was: "What uniquely qualifies you to serve (or to continue to serve) on Bethlehem City Council?"

Gadfly told the candidates that he was looking for c. 250-300 words and that more would probably be ok but that much less might feel skimpy.

Here – in alphabetical order this time (we'll vary that in subsequent posts) – are their answers to the first question/prompt.

"What uniquely qualifies you to serve (or to continue to serve) on Bethlehem City Council?"



Michael Colon (incumbent)

When I think of why I'm uniquely qualified to be on city council, I view the question from two angles. The first viewing council members as representatives of the community. Currently I am one of only two West Bethlehem residents (Councilman Waldron the other) and Latinos (Councilwoman Negrón the other) serving on council. While demographic info shouldn't be the only qualifier, I do feel I'm part of two populations that have historically been underrepresented in town hall.

Second, I view the position as a job having influence on all aspects of city government, and what do I know about city government? Prior to

serving, I spent over two years attending all council meetings, graduated from the citizens' academy, and have toured just about all city facilities. What is most unique is my background with 911. As a former county 911 dispatcher and current county employee right next door to the center, I feel my knowledge of the center and its operations will be a valuable resource as we move forward with the consolidation of city and county 911 services.



J. William Reynolds (incumbent)

During my time on City Council, policy initiatives have often been proposed or suggested by members of Council. These policy recommendations and their goals have been met with positive, unanimous consensus among Council members as to the value of the proposal. Many of these worthwhile ideas, however, ultimately have fallen short of their initial goal for various reasons. I believe that during my time on City Council that I have proven my ability to propose and implement policy initiatives that reflect the priorities of the people of Bethlehem.

Two years ago, I proposed Bethlehem 2017, a collection of policy initiatives designed to make Bethlehem a more progressive city. Bethlehem 2017 was built on not just an ideological vision but also a strategy of mobilizing many organizations and citizens in our city who wished to positively contribute to their community. Creating permanent groups of engaged citizens to work on these initiatives is vital in creating real change on the issues that matter to the people of our city. These partnerships are more valuable than passing a piece of legislation that can be well meaning but ultimately limited in scope and effectiveness. I am proud of how much of Bethlehem 2017 has been accomplished and implemented over the past two years. Working with the Administration and City Council, we have made great progress on municipal climate action, NorthSide 2027, open data, transparency and accountability in economic development incentive reporting (Financial Accountability Incentive Reporting), and improving governmental communication (Connecting Bethlehem Communications survey launching this week!). I am especially proud that each of these initiatives required collaboration with governmental and community partners including (but not limited to) the Mayor's Administration, the Bethlehem Area School District,

Moravian College, Bethlehem's Environmental Advisory Council, small businesses, and citizens throughout our city.

These relationships form the backbone of successful service on a legislative body. If re-elected, I will continue to focus on building the community partnerships necessary to create and successfully implement policies that reflect the priorities of our citizens.



Carol Ritter

My leadership roles and experiences on the local, state, and national level have taught me how to work on a team, how to lead a team and, most importantly, how to deliberate in a fair way to move toward a solution on any issue.

I am the former Board Chairman of the St. Luke's Hospital Visiting Nurses (VNA) and Hospice. I served as facilitator for many board retreats and started board education at each session so that members could learn about the VNA's programs and services. I spearheaded several unique donation-type events such as the 15 Days of Giving at Apollo Grill (where St. Luke's Hospice was a recipient of donations). As the leader I met with each board member one-to-one every year I was chairperson of the board. I was chairman of the Board during home health and hospice expansion into Monroe county. I served as an ambassador for one of my favorite programs, the VNA's Nurse Family Partnership, which is a program that serves low-income and first-time moms in our community.

I believe in 5 basic leadership principles:

1. Inspiring Others – I believe you that you can't motivate someone until you understand them. Having said that, the ability to walk in your constituent's shoes is critical to inspiring them to get involved, be part both the team and participate on some level in this great city. Community involvement can be a catalyst for strengthening the bond between elected officials and citizens. Educating the public leads to trust and trust leads to involvement and growing the team of advocates and ambassadors.
2. Embracing Change – change has been the backbone of the city for decades. When I think of change, I believe it needs to be

done with careful consideration of all of the facts and then ask yourself how will this impact the entire community?

3. Partnerships – If you want to make a difference, build the community, enhance the city and create strong neighborhoods, it's best to have partners with expertise and commitment.
 4. Ambassadorship – I see the current council as deeply dedicated to the city and as strong community ambassadors. The next step, I believe, is to create more ambassadors, more team members, city-wide. How do we identify people of influence in the community who love and believe in Bethlehem? Those influencers can be the catalyst for getting more people involved in city government and service to the community.
 5. Active Listening – possibly the most important principle of the
5. I practice active listening and have no predetermined agenda. Gathering all the facts, collaborating with experts, working with the council, will enable me to make educated, informed decisions. I have spent the last 15 years working with local small businesses, thousands of citizens and community organizations. I am deeply invested and committed to this city and would like to be part of helping Bethlehem continue to grow and prosper. As a city councilwoman I would pledge to embrace change, respect and honor the history of this city while considering what is good for the city and, more importantly, what is good for the citizens



David Saltzer

No response from David as of press time.



Paige Van Wirt (incumbent)

I think a healthy city council is one that sees itself clearly as a representative body, one that is charged with ensuring that the power of the executive/Mayor in a strong mayor form of

government is balanced by the power of the Council. This means taking an advocacy approach to issues as they come before council, ensuring that the will and the voice of the citizens of Bethlehem are heard. I am willing to ask the tough questions and be that advocate for the citizens.

I also think a healthy city council is one that makes decisions based on facts. As a scientist and physician, I am an absolute believer in the power of data to help council make decisions that will stand the test of time and provide for a resilient city. I am a small business-owner and deeply understand how municipal government's actions can adversely impact or consistently strengthen our business sector. I am a previous urban planner, and this allows me to understand the power of zoning and the need for economic development that hews to a city's character, its history — the loss of Bethlehem Steel, and its future — including the renaissance I feel is heading toward Bethlehem as other people and businesses discover this singular city.