

# “Back the Blue” rally precedes City Council meeting yesterday

The Bethlehem Gadfly Police August 12, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police 

*from Andrew Scott, “Bethlehem Council says it’s not thinking about defunding the police. Still, 100 people joined Back the Blue rally outside City Hall.” Morning Call, August 12, 2020.*

About 100 people showed support for Bethlehem police at the Lehigh Valley Tea Party’s Back The Blue rally outside City Hall during a City Council meeting.

Though City Council did not discuss defunding the police before or during its virtual Tuesday meeting, council previously passed a resolution to establish a community engagement initiative involving residents, police officers, school representatives and social justice organizations.

The resolution, which was proposed in response to the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, passed at a July 7 council meeting, where some residents demanded local police be defunded.

“That resolution was passed without a balanced public discussion,” rally organizer Greg Gagni of Bethlehem said, explaining why he felt the need for a pro-police rally.

Gagni said he and other Lehigh Valley Tea Party members are concerned the initiative could lead to defunding the police.

“We’d like to see true equality for all and an end to this rancor and divisiveness,” said Gagni, who started a Defend The Police petition that has gained 6,000 signatures in a little more than a week. “We’d like to heal the divisions without destroying either side. We can build and create better structures.”

Inside City Hall, Councilman Michael Colon rejected the idea that the resolution was about defunding the police.

“Tonight’s discussion has nothing to do with abolishing or defunding the police,” he said. “I really hope as council, a police department and community we can set an example in terms of listening to each other and understanding where differing points of view come from.”

Council President Adam Waldron said he received about 50 emails before the meeting from people concerned council was considering defunding or abolishing police, but Tuesday night’s meeting was the first of several public forums to discuss issues surrounding systemic racism.

Councilman J. William Reynolds said that in addition to reviewing police policies, he hopes further discussions can address disparities in education, housing, lack of transportation and employment opportunities that can contribute to systemic racism.

The meeting also included a review of the police department’s use-of-force policy and a report detailing how often officers resorted to force, including deadly force; the race of those subjected to force; and information about how instances involving force are investigated and reported.

Meanwhile, outside city hall rally participants lined a small section of East Church Street, waving U.S. flags, playing patriotic music and carrying signs and banners with messages supporting local police and President Donald Trump. Passing motorists honked as speakers addressed the cheering crowd with pro-police messages.

“Many of us who live and shop here and have a stake in our community, we object to defunding the police,” rally organizer and Bethlehem attorney Tom Carroll said. “We pay high taxes for proper police protection and we have an excellent police department here. If there’s a problem with police, it’s that they don’t have enough funding to be

properly trained and we need more police officers so they can engage in community policing.

”Holding a banner supporting Trump, couple Sharon and Rob Mac of Whitehall Township said defunding the police would lead to less effective law enforcement, “trouble and riots.”

“We don’t want our area to become like some other places,” Sharon Mac said. “We need police protection.”

Activist Scott Presler of Fairfax, Virginia, who travels the U.S. drumming up support for Trump’s reelection, urged people to stand up for local police.

“I support both Back The Blue and Black Lives Matter,” Presler said after speaking. “It’s so critical for both sides to come together. America suffers when there’s gridlock. I think defending and not defunding the police is something the majority of the country finds important.”

**The Bethlehem Gadfly**