

The question of “community police”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Police December 21, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police* 

ref: **Police chaperone fee . . . is questioned**

Gadfly:

BPD used to have a semi-separate “community policing” group, although I don’t know the organizational [structure]. Then, quite a few years ago now, that was abolished, and we were told that the entire department would be using a community policing approach.

Two former police officers have told me that when that change was made, community policing was, in effect, eliminated from the department. One of them said there was always an antagonism against the community policing officers, that they were not seen as “real police.” Maybe the problem was the culture, not the structure.

Perhaps the new Chief will find more effective ways to restore true community policing.

Peter Crownfield

Gadfly:

True community policing has happened in 2 forms. The key is the level of integration into the neighborhoods.

The first was the team policing of Adam, Baker and Charlie teams who were assigned to one-third (roughly) of the city each. This way they became quite familiar with those areas and residents became familiar with them. The level of cooperation was strong because these relationships were established.

The second was the neighborhood substation/bike patrols who also became integrated into the neighborhoods that they served.

I remember one commenter at a council meeting saying we don't need more pizza parties.

They are wrong in my opinion if we use "pizza parties" as a metaphor for socialization, because that helps to break down barriers.

It's not the sole answer, but it's a large part of the equation.

In Bethlehem, when bonds and identification and buy-in were best, it was because officers and residents worked together, met on the streets and sidewalks during the normal course of a day, gathered at the local playground, cooperated on a break-in spree, etc.

Each side needs to feel respected, and strengthening relationships via community policing efforts goes a long way to breaking down barriers.

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