

Like politicians, I always question the police: “It’s that power thing”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Police August 15, 2020

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

Bud and Gadfly,

I wanted to make these comments, by phone, Tuesday [at the August 11 Public Safety Committee meeting]. The meeting was long enough. Gadfly, thank you for this forum. **Bud**, thank you for your continued commitment to discussion.

One can see the protest movement is not ALL attacks, if one is not overcome by emotion/anger and biases. Those in opposition to reviewing policing (and city leadership) might benefit and come together with protesters by thinking of (much of) their inspiration in calling for “defunding” the police as self-defense. Like the police and the public trading places, I’d like to see “White” people trade places with Minorities. And not for an hour or a day. OR a week. Our history has NOT been made right.

SO WHY ARE WE MEETING TO DISCUSS THE CEI?: I have always been grateful for police. My life has been protected, and I am eternally indebted. I respect those that do it and are willing to discuss their work – our work – with me. But I ALWAYS question them. Like I must politicians. It’s that power thing.

Best Police Force? Perhaps they are in measurable ways. But “best” is dangerous. (How is it a competition?) Loved by many residents? Truly a wonderful thing. But what about the other residents – all bad? Un-uh. Until the paradigm under which policing exists is deconstructed and discussed thoroughly by Bethlehem residents – most of whom didn’t/haven’t shown up – I believe we will continue to reap the divisive results of our effort and investment from over all of the last 400 years.

The primary reason we met on Tuesday, was to answer the call inspired by the COMMUNITY VOICES demanding to be heard ON BEHALF OF OUR MINORITY FAMILY! If you don’t understand the need, please

invest the intellectual curiosity and find the compassion to research the reasoning and ASK those making the demands.

With the revelations of protests over the last several months, police – AND CITY LEADERSHIP – REVIEW must take place. THIS MUST INCLUDE FUNDING review publicly, with input from a broader representation of the community. AND NOT JUST THOSE CHOSEN BY THE MAYOR AND/OR HIS STAFF, please. Anything less fails to represent the needs of ALL community demographics. If the police are here to protect – and council and the mayor to lead – EVERYONE.

OPINION AND SCIENCE: I was happy to hear the contrasting, heartfelt, and often eloquent opinions of callers. Notwithstanding them, to make decisions, I believe we need to acquire science and then DISCUSS it WITH all stakeholders and not controlled by a political minority.

PROFESSOR OCHS/CORE: To this point, why was Professor Ochs NOT a planned/featured speaker?! To me this reveals bias and/or ignorance. Which is worse? For balance, why was her data not presented visually in the meeting for the public to see? (Fortunately, Gadfly did the city's job and posted this for our review, as well.)

I read through the police use of force policies and report prior to the meeting, thanks to Gadfly posting them. And I listened in for about 5 hours to the meeting. The professor was given extra time (AS A CITIZEN CALLER) apparently as an afterthought. Unacceptable! At least several participants joined explicitly to hear her and discuss her data. And the participation of CORE was specifically written in to the resolution!

Perhaps there will be another meeting. But WHERE IS A SCHEDULE?! Or does the public have to dig down and squeeze through a digital gopher hole to find it?

PUBLICIZING CITY MEETINGS/NEWS: What response is there from council and the mayor regarding better publicizing of council and safety meetings when such topics are to be discussed? I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE TO RAISE FLAGS ABOUT THE CITY'S POOR COMMUNICATION: unanswered emails, unanswered public questions, poor attendance . . . DO WE CARE TO ENGAGE EVERYONE? Are we not valuable enough to be worth a couple digital message boards around

the city????!!! I'D WELCOME REGULAR TEXT MESSAGES (but not as a singular substitute for message boards). Any GOOD teacher knows, you have to meet them where they are . . . if you care. (Yes, you want students to stretch. Adults too? Sure, but not at the expense of losing their input.)

The city must accept responsibility for the poor public turnout/comment on city business. (Unless it “accepts no responsibility.”) The community must certainly do the same. (This is the . . . fourth[?] . . . time I'm publishing it or speaking it at a council meeting over the last 2-3 months.) Whom did YOU let know about this meeting?

CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT: Regarding appropriate/thorough oversight, where is the effort by the city? Where is the discussion of a civilian review board? Not necessary? Well, then, why was it not until THIS SUMMER that council finally received the police dept's policies on use of force? They had to request them! Did I read correctly that Chief DiLuzio felt it was for the safety of the police that they were kept from the public? Ironic?

QUALITY OF LIFE . . . OR FEAR?/NO ONE HAS BEEN KILLED: A caller pointed out that no one has died in a police call (in the last five years?). That is good news. Someone I said that to, however, responded, “That we know of.” That's hard to hear, even for me, a skeptic. That person was a Latino with less trust of police from past experience here and in NYC. That feeling matters.

Now, shouldn't at least some of the credit for not dying by police be given to those not doing the dying? I mean, has everyone assumed that that statistic is due solely to the police? Councilwoman Negrón herself pointed out – and Gadfly highlighted – that many Blacks/Latinos/LGBTQ/Other minorities live in fear and adjust their behavior thusly.

Do we believe in a “healthy fear” of the police? I've lived – past tense – under the assumption for a long time that that's normal. But should the “affected” (Mayor Donchez's word, “Comments on Minneapolis”) live in fear of the police to the point that they LIVE. BUT AT WHAT PRICE THEIR QUALITY OF LIFE? Something is very wrong there. By “there,” I mean here, also.

AUG 11 SAFETY MEETING ATTENDANCE (to discuss the CEI): WHAT WAS IT? I want to know. Those demographics will reveal the city's effort to reach its residents.

(Finally) SURVEY/FEEDBACK: And, Mr. Mayor and Chief DiLuzio, did you consider sending a survey to those who signed up to speak/attend? To the general public?

That could still be done and could provide valuable data.

Truly,

greg zahm