

# Council Candidates – 4-year seat – Prompt 7 (44)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Candidates for election, Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues May 12, 2019

*(44th in a series of posts on candidates for election)*

*Election Day is May 21*

*5 candidates*

*(one not represented here)*

*vote for 3*

*7th in the series of candidate statements*

*statements in reverse-alphabetical order this time*

**Prompt #7, 1 & 2**

## **1) Participation**

**Gadfly followers want to be involved, want to be heard, do not see themselves as CAVE people (citizens against virtually everything). How can Council foster increased citizen participation with and trust in City government? Possible foci**

**include increased interactive technology, increased public inclusion, office hours, different kinds of Council meetings, a different format for the current Council meetings, a stronger ethics ordinance, term limits.**



**Paige Van Wirt (incumbent)**

I decided to mount a write-in campaign in the late summer of 2017 for two major reasons. First reason: nobody ran against any of the incumbents, which I felt was a disturbing reflection on citizen involvement in council, due to many factors which needed to be addressed. Second reason: after attending the City Council Committee of the Whole meeting regarding the proposed Ethics Ordinance in spring 2017, I was very upset at the substance and tenor of the conversation among council members and particularly toward Councilwoman Negron, who was trying to help make our city stronger and avoid problems like we have seen in Allentown, Reading, Scranton, Philadelphia . . . this list is too long, and the cities too close. The Ethics Ordinance was subsequently shelved. Since appointment to council, I have been pushing for more citizen participation in council by trying to open up the workings of our Authorities and Commissions; establishing a vigorous Facebook presence which posts relevant meetings and issues for citizens of Bethlehem; reintroducing the proposed Ethics Ordinance in the upcoming month; and pushing for Bethlehem City public meetings to be held after normal working hours and filmed for all to see, which has now

been requested by the Mayor to start in 2020. I will continue these efforts by continuing this work; I will request that our most active authorities and commissions present to council every 6 months updates on activities, finances, and new initiatives. I will continue keeping the citizens informed, not just of the what, but of the WHY.



**David Saltzer**

As a council member, we need the citizens to be engaged in and working with city government. Transparency is a big topic right now and one that I believe in. The ability to now watch council meetings online and follow what is going on is a step in the right direction, as is the mayor moving all committee meetings to start after 6pm beginning in 2020, allowing working residents the time to attend. I also believe there needs to be a minimum time of the announcement of important meetings so that the people that want to attend can plan to do so. Announcing a meeting at 9 or 10 am for a 4pm start is not being transparent and fosters a community of distrust. Other technologies, such as the city's website, can be managed better with meetings announced and posted on the homepage, as well as made more user friendly as well. I think between the live streaming of the meetings, an active, user-friendly website and later meeting times following announcement protocol will allow the citizens the ability to be more active in local government.

I maintain that I would have an open-door policy and would encourage residents to

reach out to me with questions or concerns. I would support office hours where

residents would be able to come speak with a city council member.

As for different types of council meetings, I believe in the past that city council did try to

take the meetings on the road and have them in different corners of the city to attract

people to come out in their neighborhoods to attend the meeting. I am not sure what the

outcome of that was or if it was talked about trying it again, but it is an idea that could be considered.

As for ethics, I know that the current council has presented an ethics policy and have

adopted some parts of it in different forms. I would need to see what was presented and

I do believe that we do need to have some type of ethics policy in the city.

For council term limits, we would need to investigate that by researching other 3rd class

cities to see if anyone else has council term limits. What are the pros and cons of them?

How long are the term limits? How has it worked out and have they changed back to no

term limits? After researching this we can come up with some type of plan, and we

should leave it up to voters in a referendum vote as to whether the constituents in the

city want their council members to have term limits.



**J. William Reynolds (incumbent)**

When I launched Bethlehem 2017, I did so partly as a way to mobilize the people in our community who are passionate, committed, and want to be involved on a local level. Our Climate Action Plan, NorthSide2027, and Open Data projects all were designed to create permanent structures of citizens to help plan and implement the initiatives. Creating positive opportunities for citizens to be informed and involved in the issues they care about is vital in creating meaningful opportunities for citizen engagement.

There are thousands of people in Bethlehem who want to be involved in giving back to

our city. They are often very busy helping their children with homework, volunteering

at their church, or running a small business. These responsibilities often prevent them

from committing to standard meeting schedules or attending City Council meetings.

Finding flexible, meaningful, engagement opportunities for our citizens is very important in creating citizen engagement moving forward. This idea was the genesis behind the structure of our planning strategy for our

Bethlehem 2017 initiatives and has proven to be effective in engaging citizens on a city-wide level.



**Michael Colon (incumbent)**

For about two and a half years before being elected I attended as many meetings of City Council as I could make it to, both regular meetings and committee meetings. After meetings I'd occasionally email a Council member if I didn't understand something I heard, and they'd always get back to me. After asking to get more involved, I was appointed to two city boards and also completed the Bethlehem Citizens' Academy. As a member of Council I've continued to encourage participation and involvement. I'm now on the receiving end of those emails and try my best to answer what questions someone has. More often I'll invite someone who wants to have a discussion to breakfast so we can really get into the nuance of the issue. Sometimes we agree, sometimes we disagree, but I always want to be respectful of differing opinions especially because we all, including myself, have the capacity to subscribe to bad ideas. We've taken steps to make meetings more accessible, in the forms of YouTube broadcasts and now mandating all board/authority meetings to be in the evening. The City's use of social media is increasing to keep people informed and give the public another avenue to reach out to City Hall. I've always favored campaign finance reform and also support term limits for elected officials, including City Council.

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## **2) A Vision of/for the City**

**The job of a leader is to have a vision that inspires citizens, that connects with citizens, that engages citizens. Sometimes that vision is capsuled in a slogan. What is your vision of/for Bethlehem? What is your vision of Bethlehem past, or Bethlehem present, or Bethlehem future? How is Bethlehem unique – in a positive, negative, or potential way? Are there best practices from other cities you would you like to see implemented in Bethlehem? Does a pedestrian/bicycle bridge that would connect the north and south sides fit into that vision?**



**Paige Van Wirt (incumbent)**

I think Bethlehem has been held in a paradigm of development that is left over from the early years when Bethlehem Steel closed: any development is good development. I think this is an outdated notion and

does not reflect the reality that we are a unique city, poised for a development boom, with a diversified tax base and beautiful downtowns, architecture, and geography. We are in this strong position in part due to the hard work of our previous city leaders. However, this economic engine must now be harnessed and directed to create a city that respects our downtowns, demands excellence in the plans and vision of the investors in our city, and hews to the notion that a great city comes from incremental, healthy organic growth of codependent businesses, and does not run after the next large, bright shiny object.

I see a walkable Bethlehem, including a pedestrian bridge project if found to be feasible, that attracts young people to stay here, or to relocate to here, because of our wonderful quality of life. I see a Bethlehem that emphasizes alternative means of transportation, including walking on our future repaired sidewalks, with increased residential density downtown to support our small businesses. I see a Bethlehem that uses data to drive decisions, not campaign donations. I see a Bethlehem that respects the environment and uses the power of the government to pilot green initiatives that have worked for other cities. I see a Bethlehem that prioritizes the development of affordable housing through targeted zoning changes which will spur construction in this price range. I see a Bethlehem, emboldened by the involvement of its citizens in local government, that is innovative, fiscally prudent, adaptive of best practices and determined to provide a joyous quality of life for all our citizens, a Bethlehem where the citizens know their voices matter, and will be heard.



**David Saltzer**

The Historic City of Bethlehem, The Christmas City, The Steel City, all of these make Bethlehem unique, and all of these describe this great city's



ideals and history. This city is rich in its history, which needs to be preserved and continue to be taught to the next generation, as well as new residents and visitors. I have concerns that we are losing some of that history by allowing buildings to be built that do not fit into the neighborhoods or blend in with the beautiful architecture of the city. We need to look into rehabilitating some of these beautiful remaining structures and reusing them rather than destroying them and building new “box” structures. We are on the cusp of an exciting time and have the opportunity to do some phenomenal things to bring affordable housing into the city and attract businesses that will work with the city to maintain some of the history while providing good jobs with a livable wage. These initiatives will attract people to live, work, and reinvest in the city, allowing it to grow and create new history. Bethlehem-present has the ability right now to make Bethlehem-future something that our previous generations would be proud of and happy to call home.

Walkability and bikeability are important issues. How can we make that more enjoyable and safer for everyone in the city? The city has applied for a grant to have a study done on this initiative. I am excited to see what the study shows and what the recommendations are.



**J. William Reynolds (incumbent)**

During my time on City Council, I have tried to lay out a vision for what our

community needs to be moving forward. I included my vision for our city in my Bethlehem 2017 initiative when I proposed making our city more progressive and investing in several areas in which I felt we could do more. We needed to focus on the issues that will determine our success in the 21 st century and do so by creating opportunities for our citizens to

be involved in helping to create the solutions to the problems of the 21st century.

We need to focus on the issues that matter to our residents – climate, neighborhood

reinvestment, technology, the efficiency of government. That focus starts with planning

that includes creating long-term strategies for our community and our city. That

planning isn't just elected officials sitting around talking. It involves government

leveraging the best asset we have – the passion of our citizens.

Our community is at its best when we have everyone working in the same direction on

an issue. Our NorthSide2027 neighborhood meetings are a great example of that.

Families, long-time residents, small business owners, community groups coming

together to work on planning what the future of their neighborhood can be. This is the

vision that I have always had for our city – our neighbors coming together to positively

talk about what we are as a community and what we can be. We are going to need

more of that to make sure Bethlehem never loses what makes our city what it is.



**Michael Colon (incumbent)**

Moving forward I want to keep making Bethlehem a place where natives want to stay and out-of-towners want to move to. As many industrial towns across this country lost their economic anchors, like a steel mill, they saw a mass exodus. Even as recently as my high school and college years, I'd have to hear from friends that Bethlehem did not appeal to them. Reasons included lack of career opportunities, a perception of a rusty old steel town, or simply "nothing to do." Through its reinvention and revitalization, Bethlehem has come out of the shadow of the Bethlehem Steel celebrating strong technology, arts, education, healthcare, and small business sectors. We are unique in how we've redefined what Bethlehem is and what it will continue to be. This energy revitalizes a community and brings it together. I envision more community hubs and events growing that bring out neighborhoods. The expanded Tunes at Twilight concert series, the upcoming 3rd season of the West Side Farmer's Market, the Recreation Bureau's Movies in the Park, all the events put on by the Downtown Bethlehem Association and SouthSide Arts District. I envision us to keep diversifying our economy, supporting the quality of life for all who live here, and fostering the sense of one big community. I support a pedestrian bridge as another means to connect the neighborhoods and encourage activity. When we stop moving, the rust comes back.



*Vote and vote informed May 21*

