

# Further thinking on what's next in the ethics case

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Ethics December 10, 2019

 *Latest in a series of posts on Ethics and City Government* 

Gadfly's been thinking more overnight about the next move in this ethics case triggered by Councilman Callahan.

Actually, he's been thinking about what should have been the first move.

As reported in our last two posts in this series, President Waldron is confident that there are City systems in-place and working for handling whistleblower complaints: one through the City Human Resources department, the other the [Controller hotline](#).

Upon reflection, Gadfly is not so confident as President Waldron.

Gadfly took his public comment time at the December 3 meeting to ask why those three City employees went to Councilman Callahan in the first place, giving him a kind of crisis of conscience that caused his (by his own account) barely suppressed anger at Council meetings that ended up exploding in his November 25 press conference.

Why take your complaint or grievance *outside* City Hall if there are mechanisms designed to resolve them *inside* City Hall?

President Waldron didn't ask that question.

Gadfly's first impulse was to ask where the chain of events that brought us to this "contentious spectacle" (Barbara Diamond's apt phrase) started so we could address the problem there and (try to) avoid this public mess in the future.

That's the kind of guy Gadfly is. Backward looking. Sigh.

So if the whistleblowers had two options besides Callahan, why didn't they use them?

That's the question some forward-looking City problem-solver should be asking.

There are two broad answers to that question: either the employees didn't know about the reporting mechanisms inside City Hall or they didn't trust them.

All Gadfly can find on the City web site about the Human Resources Department is the list of jobs available, not even the name and contact info of the Head of Human Resources. So no whistleblower guidelines can be found there. But since the web site is aimed at the public that lack might not be surprising. If information for a potential whistleblower exists, it is probably in an employee handbook or manual. Gadfly will try to get a copy. He's very interested in what what kind of system we have set up, especially who does the investigating and what protections there are.

Now the [Controller hotline](#) is, on the other hand, aimed at both employees and the public. And it may be new. The Controller web page says it "is pleased to announce the activation of a hotline," as if it just happened. And thus, if so, if it is new, can we be sure employees know about it? But if you ask Gadfly, he's surprised anybody finds the hotline. It feels to him buried on the Controller's page. Gadfly's not even sure what a Controller does (joke!) and wonders whether the general public or average employee would ever think to look for it there. More thoughts on this later.

Gadfly wonders if employees are periodically reminded of these two options. They should be.

Now knowledge of the two whistleblower options within City Hall is one thing — but trust in them is another.

The hotline can be anonymous, but you leave a voice message that is kept, archived. But maybe that's tricky. The City workforce is not all that small — 600+ workers — but maybe small enough for your voice to be recognized. Something to think about.

Perhaps evidence of use of each option would help us think about whether there is trust or not.

Gadfly sees that H.R. operates under the Business Administrator, and, of course, the hot line operates under the Controller. Perhaps this “crisis” time would be the absolute right time to review reports done by these entities on whistleblower cases and hotline usage or to compile such reports if they have not been done in order to evaluate the efficacy of both means of resolving employee grievances.

Some appropriate report to the public of such evaluation of effectiveness could certainly then be done.

*to be continued . . .*