

More information needed on how we identify and weed out the “bad apples”

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing June 12, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on the George Floyd killing* 

So the most important thing in front of us right now is the City’s response to the George Floyd killing.

(Someone told me that the planters the City has been making to enable outdoor dining with some style as well as safety have started to appear, seducing us to put the pandemic behind us, but, c’mon, keep your eye on the ball — issues of police and race should top our civic menu.)

Mayor Donchez made a statement. **Chief DiLuzio** made a statement. All the **Councilmembers** made statements. And now Councilmembers Reynolds and Crampsie Smith have asked the Chief to respond by Monday, June 15 to a June 9 memo entitled **Use of Force Directives and a Community Engagement Initiative**.

That’s where we are now.

Gadfly likes to divide and focus, so he has been limiting his thinking over the past couple posts solely to the “Use of Force Directives” part of the Councilors’ memo.

Based on the Chief’s response to Councilwoman Crampsie Smith at the Council meeting, Gadfly has said he feels the Chief will hit a triple if not a home run in regard to department policies and training.

But based on the Chief’s and the City’s response to the possibility that a Bethlehem officer behaved in a racially insensitive way involving a traffic stop of an Hispanic man in September 2019, Gadfly has misgivings about department policy and practice investigating and policing “one of their own.”

Since there was a black-out of information, Gadfly can not speak with certainty, but it looked to him that the Chief jumped too quickly to defend the officer without contacting the complainant or the Hispanic

man — and responded in an extreme way, charging the complainant of improper behavior (to refresh on the full details, click **“police”** on the sidebar under Topics). The officer was eventually cleared of any allegation of unprofessional or illegal activity by an internal review — which could well have been run by the Chief himself. We just don’t know. There was a Council Public Safety committee meeting on the heels of the Mayor closing this case, air-tight. Council didn’t publicly question the City action in a case with obvious racial overtones. Council took a hands-off approach. Which is the reason why Gadfly hopes the discussion between Council and Chief in response to the memo, if it happens, will include airing the process of internal investigation as well as the value of outside review in racially charged situations.

There is national debate over whether the violence carried out on people of color by police is the result of systemic racism or rogue officers. That debate is tangled. Once again, Gadfly likes to divide and focus. He likes to keep it simple if possible. He can’t say for sure that there is systemic racism in the Minnesota police department, but he knows there was a rogue officer there. Derek Chauvin had 17 previous complaints against him, all dismissed except one. And yet he was still on the force. Somehow he managed to stay on the force. Until he finally sent a shock around the world.

Gadfly would like more information about how we identify and weed out the rogues — who, after all, will have had all the training provided by or required by the department like Chauvin did — before we have an incident that propels us into the same foul mouthful of cities like Minneapolis, Louisville, Austin, and the like.

One more thing about the Chief. And this is Gadfly being a bitchy gadfly for sure.

The Chief made a fine statement at Council. He pulled no punches. Gadfly applauded him for that. We know where *he* stands about the kind of police work demonstrated by Derek Chauvin and the others. But where do *the officers* stand? Remember that 57 officers in Buffalo resigned from their tactical unit in the case of the “elderly” man who was knocked to the ground — resigned in opposition to their superiors. Sometimes leadership and the troops are not on the same page.

The Chief made a fine statement that Gadfly applauded him for, but — he said clearly — he made it “on behalf” of the department. What a difference it would make if the Chief said he read and discussed his statement with the force at large and they agreed. That, therefore, it was a statement not just from the Chief but from the whole department.

What a difference it would make if the **Bethlehem FOP Star Lodge #20** joined in the statement or made one of their own. Where is the voice of the police union, unions which, we read in the news, sometimes play key roles in attempts to discipline officers?

At the March 3 Public Safety meeting discussion focused on officer discretion in applying the new City ordinance or the State law to cases involving small amounts of marijuana. It did not matter that Council voted 7-0 to signal it wanted officers to use the summary offense City ordinance in most cases. The officers were using their discretion and doing otherwise in the vast majority of the cases. The Chief reported that he went to roll call and platoon meetings to talk up the City ordinance.

Did the Chief do a similar thing in seeking general acceptance for his Floyd statement?

But the larger point is that no matter what Council wants, no matter what the Chief personally feels or how much training he institutes, the individual officer is free in a lot of cases to act as he or she determines. And we need to be sure that once we see or sense a “bad apple,” that officer is shown the door.

Your thoughts?

Now let’s move to the Community Engagement Initiative part of the Reynolds/Crampsie Smith memo to the Chief.