

Police Department reorganization at Public Safety Committee meeting Tuesday March 2

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing February 27, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts in the wake of the George Floyd murder* 

The Public Safety Committee (Chair Colon, members Negron and Crampsie Smith) meets at 5:30 Tuesday, March 2, immediately before the regularly scheduled City Council meeting.

The subject is “Police reorganization.”

We know that the current Chief, Chief Kott, has only held her position since September.

So we can assume that the report at this meeting will embody her plan to shape the department according to her views on policing.

We cannot assume that the meeting will relate to the momentous events of last summer — the killing of George Floyd, the several notable subsequent killings in police actions, the national reckoning with race, and the discussions about re-imagining public safety that ensued.

The meeting might do these things. But we can’t assume.

For instance, when the Mayor requested such a meeting at the February 16 City Council meeting, he clearly said that it would not deal with the Community Engagement Initiative — the Council plan initiated by members Reynolds and Crampsie Smith that was our main response to GeorgeFloyd.

We cannot assume that the meeting will relate to how police handle what Gadfly has called some “first contact” situations, especially, for instance, those that could be identified as mental-health issues.

Trying not to get entangled in the verbal and political barbed wire of “defunding” (a term which he virtually always puts in quotes to indicate its vexed meaning, to the perplexity of follower John Rothschild who wants him to drop the term altogether), Gadfly has simply pointed out

that to him there is an obvious problem in how some calls are handled by police, that that problem should be aired, and that, if appropriate, changes should be made.

Gadfly has been impatient with the City's delay in considering such issues that to him seem to demand first rank attention. Though he recognizes that Chief Kott is new in her position. And though he recognizes that there is a pilot program with the Health Bureau.

Gadfly has said several times that he is afraid George Floyd will be forgotten, that the momentum crest of his killing is passing, that we will soon be asking "George who?"

He hears no one else calling for the kind of internal analysis and self-analysis of the department that last year's "history" called for.

He thinks that only he and follower Michele Downing care about such. (Ha! true, Michele?)

(Though he does note hopefully "re-imagining public safety" in candidate Hillary Kwiatek's stump message for City Council.)

But this upcoming meeting prods him to dip in to his clipping file and remind himself and others about some cases that highlight the issues that warrant re-imagining how public safety is done.

Hence the next several posts.

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