

Resident comments pertinent to Adam Waldron's candidacy for council presidency

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government January 13, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on city government* 

Gadfly has been working slowly through the eventful January 6 City Council meeting.

He always works slowly, doesn't he? Sigh.

Olga Negron (by Paige Van Wirt) and Adam Waldron (by Grace Crampsie Smith) were the nominees for Council presidency.

Twenty-two residents flooded the podium to speak for Negron. (Geezuz, Gadfly, give us a break on this, willya!)

Was Council president Waldron not spoken of?

He was, he was.

A few residents prefaced their support for Negron with thanks to Waldron for his two years as Council president.

<https://youtu.be/TwFrBbz2fSE>

But a few residents also criticized what we might call Council president Waldron's "management style."

There has been a sense in some quarters that Council president Waldron has on occasion let the meetings get out of control — let the Council members get out of control, to be more precise.

There has been a sense in some quarters that Council president Waldron has a “soft gavel” and has failed to exercise proper discipline among Council members.

It will be no surprise to Gadfly followers that these criticisms center on Councilman Callahan and his contentious interchanges with Councilpeople Reynolds, Van Wirt, and Negron.

Council president Waldron’s critics point to a breakdown in order and decorum, a loss of cooperation on Council, a loss of Council reputation among the public, and the erosion of public confidence.

His critics look for a heavier gavel or a different person wielding the gavel.

<https://youtu.be/lpKJu6au0GM>

This criticism of Council president Waldron’s “management style” or perhaps what we might call “management philosophy” reminded Gadfly of related events that happened exactly a year ago.

However you feel about Council president Waldron’s management/style philosophy, you have to admire that he has been forthright, candid about it, and has asked for feedback from Council and the public that might prompt him to change.

Here is what he said a year ago at the January 2, 2019, Council meeting:

I also want to make a couple general remarks which I’m sure some other members of council will want to jump in on once we get to new business about some of the accusations of some of the rules of Robert’s Rules, and my opinion on that. I spoke to Mr. Spirk about it, and I went

back and did some research on some of the minutes and some of the things that were said by members of council and by members of the public, and I just don't see a lot there as far as violation of Robert's Rules. Personal attacks, I think, is a term getting thrown around for political reasons. I think there's a healthy debate, and I think there's respect for each another on Council. We may not agree with each other, and that's fine, and that comes down to the vote some times, and I like to think they we can move forward professionally. But I think there is a decorum here, and I don't think that there has been a lack of professionalism. There's been calls for me to gavel down other members of Council when they are speaking, and I don't see myself doing that in 2019. I think that the First Amendment is strong and well in this room, and I have great respect for it to the point that I respect it over Robert's Rules. I think that people should have the ability to speak their mind as long as they are doing it in a respectful way, and I think that disagreement is good because it shows different points of view and perspectives. Again, you may not agree with that assessment, and you might think that we should follow Robert's Rules to the "T," but my view is that we should be able to have a positive conversation in which we respectfully disagree with each other. That is not prone to personal attacks just because we use each other's names. That doesn't mean that it is a personal attack. It's just a differing of opinion. . . . I give great respect to Robert's Rules, but I think the First Amendment, as Mr. Spirk would agree, in court rulings is that the First Amendment will trump Robert's Rules any day of the week. So if you want to point to Robert's Rules and say these are the rules we are supposed to be following, I do respect those, however, I think that a healthy dialog starts with the ability to express yourself, and if you don't like what someone else is saying, I don't think censoring their speech is the right thing. I think topping it with better speech, more accurate, or a different point of view is a fine thing to do, just like Mr. Antalics and I did this evening. And we can respectfully disagree on a different point of view, but that's part of the process, I think.

Gadfly engaged with these comments in such posts as:

[A Matter of decorum](#) (January 12, 2019)

[A Matter of censorship](#) (January 14, 2019)

[First Amendment and Robert's Rules](#) (January 14, 2019)

The comments by Council president Waldron and by Gadfly were about incidents at Council meetings in 2018. It is fair to say, as you hear in the critical voices above, that incidents in 2019 were even more troublesome.

Since, as Waldron himself said, the job of Council president is 90% running the meetings, 10% communicating with Council, management style/philosophy is a prime concern.