

A modest proposal: an annual “States of the City” forum

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Modest proposals May 3, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts on City Government* 

Occasionally over the past three years, Gadfly has made “modest proposals” about our City government (see [here](#)).

He’d like to sneak in one more in the short time he has left.

The Mayor’s annual “State of the City” address has always bothered him, closet populist that he is.

An address given to the business community. And which would have cost Gadfly \$99 to attend when he toyed with the idea in 2019. Of course, he didn’t go.

Yes, there will be a newspaper article about these addresses, and the address will be posted on the City web site, and it can be found online, and the Mayor did read it one time at a City Council meeting.

But, frankly, it has seemed to Gadfly that “we” aren’t even encouraged to know about the address much less care about it. One would think, he jokes, that an address with such an august title would be rabidly talked about from bars, to barbershops, to the line at Starbucks, to the checkout line at Wegman’s.

Gadfly will recklessly estimate that 90% of Bethlehem residents do not even know of the existence of a state of the city address.

Simple knowing that there is such an address that you would think should be of interest (or made to be of interest) to every adult resident in the city is one thing.

But the aspect of it that has most stuck in Gadfly’s craw is that the business community is the sole anointed audience for so important a talk.

Gadfly has just not been able to get by that.

That seems so patently wrong.

Gadfly made all this yadayada the subject of Gadfly Forum #7 for all the candidates (see their responses: ([mayoral, council](#))). You can hear him talk about his wrestling with this topic in the prompt for Gadfly Forum #7 [here](#).

So . . .

So Gadfly had an idea.

A modest proposal.

In January 2020 he conceived of a Gadfly feature called “States of the City.” Yes, state(s). Plural.

His idea is described in the prospectus below, a prospectus that he shared privately with some of you during the first quarter of 2020.

You know who you are.

And some of you agreed — courageous souls.

The idea was that Gadfly would do a feature called “States of the City” in conjunction with the Mayor’s “State of the City” address.

But the pandemic intervened in 2020.

Address canceled.

And the past year has been so artificially abnormal because of the pandemic, Gadfly didn’t feel it was appropriate to revive the idea this spring.

So the Mayor flew a solo **“State of the City”** address again this past April 2.

Did you read it? Hear it?

So Gadfly makes the modest proposal that each spring we have an annual “States of the City” forum in complementary conjunction with the Mayor’s “State of the City” address.

The January 2020 prospectus is below, and you can hear Gadfly talk more about the rationale behind this modest proposal [here](#) in the prompt for Gadfly Forum #7.

Think of this as Gadfly’s gift to you in his Last Will and Testament!

January 2020

States of the City
A series of posts on the Bethlehem Gadfly

“There are eight million stories in the naked city. This has been one of them.”

So goes the iconic line about New York from the 1948 film *The Naked City*.

There are 75,000 stories in the Bethlehem city. The Mayor’s is one of them.

It’s an important one.

The Mayor is our leader, our spokesman.

But his is not the only story.

In April. the Mayor gives the annual State of the City address to an assembled group of business leaders sponsored by the Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce.

It is a special time, a ritual taking stock of where we’ve come from, where we are, where we are going.

But it is one man’s vision in front of one kind of audience with one kind of shared consciousness.

The Mayor alone does not, cannot, should not always speak for all of us on all matters regarding so important, yet so elusive a topic as the State of the City.

In the days following the Mayor's address, the Bethlehem Gadfly will host a series of 3-5 posts titled "States of the City."

The purpose of this series is not to criticize or compete with the Mayor's address but to complement it.

He can't talk about everything in that one address.

The purpose of this series is not partisan response as we see to the presidential State of the Union address.

In fact, the posters will be encouraged not to mention the Mayor's address at all if possible.

The purpose of this series is to engage a diversity of voices in the shaping of our identity.

The purpose of this series is to recognize and authenticate a few more of those multiple viewpoints among our most thoughtful residents.

The purpose of this series in the Bethlehem Gadfly is to encourage the wide-ranging conversation among multiple perspectives that builds community.

"Good conversation builds community"