

CITY OF BETHLEHEM
City Council Memorandum

SUBJECT: Community Engagement Initiative

TO: Robert J. Donchez, Mayor

FROM: J. William Reynolds, Member of Council
Grace Crampsie Smith, Member of Council

DATE: June 29, 2020

Let us start by thanking you and the City of Bethlehem Police Department for facilitating peaceful protests following the abhorrent murder of George Floyd and for making genuine efforts to engage the community in a non-confrontational and constructive dialogue about racial justice and policing practices.

As discussed at a previous City Council meeting, we are proposing the creation of a citywide Community Engagement Initiative. It would include a broad coalition of residents, police officers, representatives from our schools, social justice and community organizations, medical organizations, and other stakeholders, individuals, and entities.

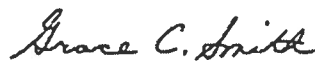
We believe the time is now to create a consistent, public space for the long-term discussion of issues surrounding systemic racism, discrimination, race-based inequities, social justice, mental health, addiction, poverty eradication, inclusionary housing, education, and fair policing practices. While we believe our City has made significant progress advancing racial and social justice and improving policing practices for the benefit of all our diverse communities, we cannot rest on that progress. We must work together to recognize and talk about the uncomfortable fact that many of our citizens believe they are not always treated fairly under the law based on the color of their skin or their street address. We must also take a hard look at how the City deals with social justice issues beyond racial justice and equity.

Thank you again for all of your efforts to engage our citizens in a constructive and self-reflective dialogue about how we can do better for all our citizens, irrespective of their racial and ethnic backgrounds or socioeconomic status. We look forward to continuing this constructive, and sometimes uncomfortable, conversation.

I would ask the Members of Council to consider the attached resolution at the July 7, 2020 City Council meeting.



J. William Reynolds, Member Council



Grace Crampsie Smith, Member of Council

CC: Members of Council
Chief of Police

DRAFT

RESOLUTION NO. 2020-

**Resolution urging the creation of a
Community Engagement Initiative in the City of Bethlehem**

WHEREAS, following the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, and during a period of justified outrage and anger, people across the nation and around the world have engaged in massive and sustained protests against persistent patterns of racial injustice and inequity in the United States and other countries. In the United States, a primary focus of these protests has been on policing practices affecting Black, Latinx, and other minority communities;

WHEREAS, Bethlehem City Council thanks our Police Department and its officers for facilitating and protecting peaceful protests and we recognize our Police Department' successful efforts in protecting public safety and property while at the same time protecting the community's vital right of free expression. Our community has come together to grieve, talk, mobilize, and peacefully protest racial injustice in cooperation with our Police Department and not as adversaries against our police;

WHEREAS, Bethlehem City Council commends the Mayor and our Police Department for being the first City in the Lehigh Valley to release its unredacted police use of force policy and further recognizes that our Police Department proactively incorporated many of the 8 Can't Wait police use of force directives into their operations many years prior to George Floyd's murder, as part of the Police Department's accreditation process, and further recognizes that the Police Department has been receptive and responsive in recently making additional changes to strengthen the 8 Can't Wait use of force directives in Bethlehem. Moreover, we recognize our Police Department's current community engagement efforts. We also recognize the need for further re-evaluation and review of our Department's use of force policy to achieve compliance with all federal and state guidelines, current case law and the best standards and practices available in alignment with 8 Can't Wait;

WHEREAS, Bethlehem City Council believes we must and can do better as a city to build stronger bridges and trust between our Police Department and our community, and that working together, we can avail ourselves of this opportunity to work collaboratively and self-reflectively to improve the relationship between our Police Department and our diverse ethnic and racial communities, that together, make up the City we all love;

WHEREAS, Bethlehem City Council believes that now is the time to create a consistent, public space for the long-term discussion of issues surrounding systemic racism, discrimination, race-based inequities, social justice, mental health, addiction, poverty eradication, inclusionary housing, education, and fair policing practices. While we believe our City has made significant progress advancing racial justice and equality and improving policing practices for the benefit of all our diverse communities, we cannot rest on that progress. We must work together to recognize and talk about the uncomfortable fact that many of our citizens believe they are not always treated fairly under the law based on the color of their skin or street address;

WHEREAS, Bethlehem City Council acknowledges that community organizations and institutions dedicated to racial equality, social justice, mental health, addiction treatment, poverty

eradication, inclusionary housing, education, and fair policing practices must have a permanent public voice in City Hall and within our Police Department; and

WHEREAS, a community-wide coalition dedicated to promoting awareness of these issues, stimulating discussion, and charting possible courses of action is essential in eliminating the systemic racism and inequity that is present in our society. By gaining more understanding of the depth, impacts, and intersection of these issues, today and over the long term, our community will be better positioned to build trust between our citizens and government institutions and to create solutions grounded in equity and fairness. It is imperative that we create as wide of a space as possible to include all community voices in this important conversation.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT:

RESOLVED, that the City Council of the City of Bethlehem urges the Mayor and his Administration to collaborate with the City of Bethlehem Police Department to create a public space and forum for the long-term discussion of issues surrounding systemic racism, discrimination, race-based inequities, social justice, mental health, addiction, poverty eradication, inclusionary housing, education, and fair policing practices (“Community Engagement Initiative”). The Community Engagement Initiative might include and/or interface with any individuals or entities that the Mayor and his Administration think appropriate such as citizens, human service organizations, the medical community, school leaders, social justice organizations, police officers, and Police Department leaders.

Some of the group’s primary functions might include:

- Assist City government in setting funding and resource allocation priorities within the City of Bethlehem Police Department;
- Assist in organizing Police Department non-enforcement neighborhood events in order to build more trust between citizens, our individual police officers, and our Police Department as a whole;
- Discuss the intersection of race, homelessness, mental health, addiction, poverty, housing, law enforcement, and other issues;
- Discuss law enforcement and policing issues, including data on arrests and enforcement activities across our City’s geographic zones and diverse racial and ethnic communities; and
- Generate policy proposals and create metrics to measure any policy changes.

Sponsored by _____

ADOPTED by Council this day of , 2020.

President of Council

ATTEST:

City Clerk