

PRESS CONFERENCE

11/25/19 4:00 PM

Bethlehem Councilman Bryan Callahan Response to Mayor Donchez Statement to Council and Concerns Raised Regarding the Department Of Community and Economic Development.

In June of last year, it came to my attention that 3 employees from the Department of Community and Economic Development were upset and disturbed and indicated that the head of their department specifically directed the employees , 2 current and 1 prior employee, that there should be deliberate inaction encouraged in the department by Director Karner to "slow, delay, and stall all permits ", with the end goal being that if enough residents, taxpayers, contractors and developers complained enough that she could then have a rationale to ask the Administration to hire more employees.

Also in late June of last year, I had two discussions about this information with a couple members of Council. I did not know how to respond to the information I was given, for if it was true, it would be completely out of line

and unethical. One of the Council members who I discussed this with, stated to me, that if true it is "fireable".

In late September or early October I expressed to the Mayor, during a side conversation, my concerns. After a couple weeks passed on October 17th, I sent the Mayor the following email through City Clerk Robert Vidoni.

This is the memo I sent to City Clerk Robert Vidoni to forward to the Mayor on Oct. 17th.

See Item #1

I also referenced an article by Lehigh Valley Ramblings Blogger Bernie Ohare that he posted on June 14th, 2019. In the post comments section Mr. Ohare also references 3 individuals that contacted him with the same information. I am only assuming they are the same 3.

See Item #2 and Item# 3

Because of the sensitivity of the situation, I asked for it to only be shared with Mr. Evans, Solicitor Leeson, President Waldron and Solicitor Spirk. I simply asked that the Mayor have **his** Business Administrator Mr. Evans and **his** Solicitor Mr. Leeson to interview members of the department to find out if the allegations were accurate.

To be very clear and to emphasizeI wasn't asking for Council to investigate and interview the employees. I simply asked that **his own** Business Administrator and **his own** Solicitor conduct the interviews because I trust their judgment and professional ability to find out the truth of what happened, to be fair to Director Karner, to protect with confidentiality the statements of the employees interviewed and to be fair to the residents and taxpayers of the City of Bethlehem.

After conducting the interviews with the employees, had Mr. Evans and Mr. Leeson concluded they had found nothing out of line or unethical, I would have considered the matter closed and would have never brought up the subject again.

On Tuesday night Nov. 19th, I arrived approximately 15 minutes late to the City Council meeting due to Parent/Teacher conferences at Northeast Middle School. When I sat down at my Council seat I noticed a letter in an envelope addressed to me, from the Mayor.

On the bottom of the Mayors memo in bolded capital letters he typed:

"HARD COPY HAND DELIVERED ONLY"

Not emailed, hard copy and hand delivered only!

See Item #4

It was very obvious and clear to me after reading his first sentence that he had no intention of interviewing the participants, he wrote... "Your memo of October 21 does not provide sufficient cause to conduct the investigation requested". He had absolutely no interest in even looking into the subject!!

He then stated that, based on Mr. Leeson's and Mr. Evans advice (not his own sense of right and wrong) that if I provided documents, names, particulars.....and indicia of corroboration that he **might** reconsider.

The ironic thing is that just as I finished reading his letter, he then started reading a prepared statement to all of Council, and while my name was not mentioned, the comments were clearly directed at me. In his comments he questioned my tone of voice and that my questioning of the Dept. Head Ms. Karner, "was unprovoked, out of order, without cause and completely out of line". He then stated that he would no longer require his department heads to attend council meetings if questioned or in his words "attacked". For the Mayor to refer to me questioning and asking a direct question , **from my council seat**, as "an attack ".....was just hyperbole and I felt an attempt to intimidate me and get me to back down and drop the subject.

See Item #5

Mayor, I nor anyone else on Council has the right to conduct interviews of your cabinet members/Department Heads or the employees under your charge and direction. You know this!

I also can't provide or guarantee, to the two current employees, protection if they speak the truth about what they were directed to do by Ms. Karner or from retribution from Ms. Karner, as like what happened to the other employee.

As I told Mr. Evans in yesterday's phone call..... it's your job to get to the bottom of what happened.....not mine! After I told Mr. Evans that the press had asked for the memos and that I provided them, it was only then that you asked for me to come in to discuss what I knew.

See Item #6

It was only then that you were, "requesting my presence.....for an interview". As I told Mr. Evans, after your comments and remarks directed at me at Council on Tuesday night.....that ship had sailed. It's your

responsibility to find out what happened and to interview those employees.....not mine.

That is what the 76,000 residents and taxpayers would expect?

That is **exactly** why I asked to go into Executive Session months ago, which the Mayor denied!

Other than Ms. Karner (for the obvious reasons above) I have a great working relationship with every one of your Department Heads. In fact I often socialize outside of City business with several of them.

For the first six years that I have been on Council, we as a whole have worked together professionally and collegially. My current issues with some members of Council began early last Summer when Ms. Karner fired a great long term city employee (1 of the 3 employees who Ms. Karner directed to, "delay, slow down and stall all permits"). She was regarded as one of the City of Bethlehem's best employees who worked extremely hard, competently and professionally under other Mayors and Department Heads with absolutely no issues.

At that time I asked the Mayor to bring all of Council into executive session so that we could, in private, discuss the matter. He refused to! I then asked Council as a whole to move to executive session, but taking the lead from a Council member who is currying favor with the Mayor, for a Mayoral endorsement in a year and a half , they did not agree to go into executive session, which was very disturbing.

From that point on I have become more vocal at Council and, I will admit, I have had a "tone" that something isn't right here.

I know and I do realize that I have a strong personality but you have to understand that since the loss of my wife 13 years ago to cancer, I have become more passionate and intense.....and yes I even speak with more energy, emotion..... and yes.....a tone at times

Time and life is short and I intend to spend, I hope, the next 10 years or so helping to fix and solve the problems and issues in our great city.

As Ted Kennedy said of his brother Robert during his eulogy many years ago, "he saw a wrong and tried to right it".

Well , on a very much smaller scale in our little city.....that's what I am going to do. That is exactly why I spoke up so strongly about how wrong it is to charge children the same price as charging an adult at the golf driving range. In your statement to Council you called my concerns about overcharging Bethlehem's kids , "a protracted challenge about offering discounted golf balls to students at the driving range another unseemly interlude".

In **every single** recreational fee that the City charges for daily rates and seasonal rates in Tennis, Swimming Pools, Ice Rink, and the Golf Course..... the driving range is the **only** recreational facility that does not have a youth rate vs. an adult rate.....Mayor, in your words.....I find that unseemly! Shouldn't we be encouraging children to get outside and off all the video games? Isn't that what the recreational department is for? To that end I will continue to fight for the children in our city!

I hope you will take this letter and reconsider looking into the aforementioned issues and do what is right for not only the employees in the Community Economic Development Dept. who want to continue to

work hard, but who are in fear of retribution , but also for the taxpayers of Bethlehem, for the parents who wondered where their permit was for the pool that they wanted to put in for their kids at the beginning of last Summer, but couldn't because the permit was purposefully being delayed, for the Senior Citizen who's permit was purposefully delayed for his deck or patio, for the neighbor who's permit was purposefully delayed for their addition and also for the contractors whose permits were purposefully delayed and that they have been waiting for, so that they can start working on the jobs that they need to pay their family's bills.

Moving forward, it is my hope that we can work together to provide an open and transparent government that our citizens deserve.

Councilman Bryan Callahan