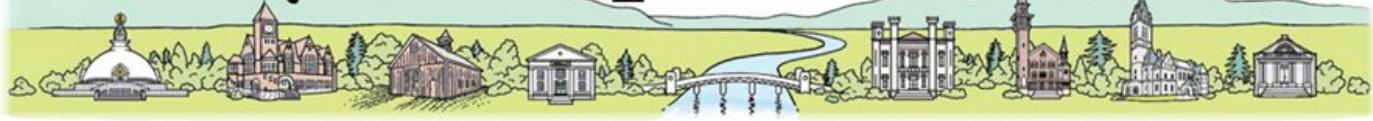


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## Dennis Bidwell: Explains role with mayor's downtown work group



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### Explains role with mayor's downtown work group

Regarding the Gazette's May 10 article, "In defense of panhandling: Two city councilors object to mayor's work group, survey," I was out of town and unavailable for comment when reporter Bera Dunau was preparing it.

Because the article was based on a statement issued by councilors Alisa Klein and Maureen Carney that contains inaccurate information about my role as a member of the City Council's Committee on Community Resources (CCR) and as a member of the mayor's work group, I set the record straight.

The statement by Carney and Klein, as reported by the Gazette, asserts that I objected to having "panhandlers" as members of the work group, and they question whether I carried to the work group the CCR's recommendation that it include "panhandler" representation.

In fact, I supported the committee's recommendation for "panhandler" inclusion in the work group, and I carried that to the mayor and his work group. I then reported back to the CCR on the work group's extensive discussion of this recommendation.

>

The minutes of the June 19, 2017, meeting of the CCR read: Bidwell "stated that there was another conversation (at the work group) about bringing a panhandler into the group; there was a consensus that this would not be the best way to get input about the panhandling population. Rather, a sub-group is working on a survey instrument that will be used to gather input from the various members of the downtown on-the-streets community."

A report summarizing the in-depth interviews of 18 members of the on-the-streets community is forthcoming.

I understand that councilors Carney and Klein, then and now, disapprove of a work group that in any way regards "panhandling" as an issue worthy of understanding and investigation, and I understand their frustration that their views on various matters did not prevail in our council committee.

What I don't understand is why, 16 months after the committee issued its report (with the support of councilors Carney and Klein), they would resurrect their old objections, this time using inaccurate information to do so.

I am proud to have been working diligently with the mayor and work group members (representatives of social service, housing and mental health organizations, clergy, the police and other city departments, and downtown business representatives) to better understand the complicated dynamics of our downtown communities and to, exactly as was recommended by the CCR, "explore non-ordinance and non-punitive ways of addressing the needs of downtown at-risk populations and ways that expanded resources can be directed towards the agencies and organizations doing direct work with our at-risk populations."

Going forward, I would hope for more accuracy and more open-mindedness regarding the important work of this group and the carefully considered recommendations the mayor will announce in the weeks and months to come.

Dennis Bidwell

Northampton

The writer is the city councilor from Ward 2.

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