

1/19/06

THE YEAR NOT WORTH REVIEWING

Each year in January, like many other publications, I sum up the year by going back through my columns and picking out important events. It is not necessary for 2005 as there were only a handful of actions worth remembering. It could probably be boiled down to three: a year of "almosts." Council stalling the election of the mayor by the people, feeble attempts to reopen the bridge over the river "Why", and stabs at lowering wild and crazy assessments craftily designed to bring in tons of money for desperately needed (?) city enhancements. Lets start with...

For a while last spring it appeared that Council was beginning to get its back up and square off with the city manager. Mr. Milteer was the first crack in the eggshell when he pleaded for at least a five-cent reduction in the property tax rate. For a few weeks both Calvin Jones and Linda Johnson seemed willing to enter the fray and expressed total agreement that something must be done to offset the creation of more "unaffordable housing." But they had forgotten the eloquence of the city manager that then "boxed their ears" back into line and Council settled for a two-cent pittance reduction. This token got Council members off the hook with their constituents, but only temporarily.

Not only were the elderly, a day over 65, suffering the property tax, gasoline costs, heating costs, food and drug increases; the younger recent home buyers discovered their mortgage payments were going out of sight because mortgages quietly include property taxes. As flexible mortgage interest rates shoot up there may soon be "bargains" available in the housing market as many are forced to dump their oversized homes.

Then there was the bridge closing. Nothing in the history of Suffolk, including the Civil War, has raised such uproar as when travelers to the east found a thousand yards of the road missing. VDOT would not even permit "Proceed At Your Own Risk." Not only was this an inconvenience, the lengthy detour costs began to add up quickly as the price of black gold shot up. To say nothing about how folks had to change their commuting habits. There were arguments about realigning the bridge route; some say we would have had a bridge quicker if they hadn't moved it causing VDOT money to evaporate. Now a task force has

been formed and will probably conclude they are riding a dead horse. There will be no rising of this Phoenix.

As for the people electing the mayor, forget it. The central seven have put it off for at least a year, and by then most folks will be over the notion. Council will go back to playing spin the bottle to see whose turn it is to be in photo ops. Our current mayor comes out well in newspaper snapshots and is dignified to boot. How long he will reign is up to the changeable attitude of his peers. (Remember Dana Dickens) Let's see now, who has not been mayor? Jones, Johnson, Bennett and Brown? Place your bets.

There were a few important events...the brouhaha over the Jefferson School was news for weeks. There were tears when Elizabeth The First left town but she will return as Elizabeth the Second with the handsome new title, "Assistant Manager In Charge of Assisting Business People Enhancing The Mixed Use Downtown." (AMICOABPEMUD) Then there was the gauntlet thrown down by Mr. Milteer who wants more development south of the downtown border. He will have his way and there now is a bad rip in our bag of UDO inflexible rules. He will have his grocery store and much more.

Oh yes, the Hilton opened after selecting several employees from the 600 hundred that applied for jobs as high at \$9.00 per hour. You can see their cars parked by the side nearest McDonalds. Andy Damiani did a Roundtable TV show there and I remember the young manager saying the hotel owned the Conference Center that really belongs to the city. I understand he recently left this gold mine to seek better opportunities. Really?