

We're back!!

COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS Fiction or Fact?

Checked your water bill lately? If so perhaps you noticed the accompanying newsletter titled **Town Council Highlights for 2006**. At first glance this appears to be a newsletter promoting our new council's first-year accomplishments. If that were the case, it would certainly be of public interest, and worth the effort and expense of publication. But is that the case? We took a closer look at these claims and we thought we would share just a small portion of what we found.

There are 25 bulleted "highlights" listed in the newsletter, but it actually outlines about 30 items council seems to be taking credit for. So, let's break a few down and see what you think.

Fiction: "The Town is working on a grant to provide lighting and landscaping for the US 421 corridor from River Road to Dow Road."

Fact: Yes, council did request this grant, but there are no guarantees it will ever materialize. More importantly, let's not forget what council choose to sacrifice when option for the new grant. The previous council secured a DOT grant for improvements to the North End corridor (CB Ave. North).

Those grant improvements included street upgrades, bicycle paths, signage, and a new traffic plan. All of which would not only have helped route traffic southbound, thereby creating a more safe pedestrian corridor that would have encouraged tourist and citizens to walk and ride bicycles to the CBD/Boardwalk area, but would also have helped revitalization of the CBD.

That grant was sitting on the new Mayor's desk when he came into office. But instead of acting on it, his poor leadership led to procrastination, and as a result it appears our town has now lost the North End grant. **Does Mayor Clark really feel that losing a \$264,400 grant for badly needed town improvements is a highlight of his leadership?**

Fiction: "Sidewalk improvements and sidewalk maintenance are underway throughout the town.", "Clean up and improvements have been made to the gazebo area of the Boardwalk, and "Ditches surrounding the lake have been cleaned out..."

Fact: Every budget year funds are allocated for numerous improvements of this type, and every year the operations department goes about those improvements without direction from council. Council did not increase this year's budget for sidewalk improvement, clean up at the boardwalk, or cleaning of the ditches. Nor has council directed the operations department to employ any extra resources or efforts for such improvements. **Mr. Mayor, this is called routine main - te - nance.**

Fiction: "The town is working on engineering and permitting for improvements to Lift Station #1."

Fact: Wrong. Due to a substantial budget cutback, the operations department has had to halt all improvement work on Lift Station #1. Council was warned that their "No Growth" policy would result in funding shortages and eventually the reduction of town services. We have no problem saying "we told you so".

Fiction: "The Harbor Management Plan is nearing completion."

Fact: It was not this council, but the previous council, that completed the research, approvals, and funding for this plan. Secondly, it is a gross misrepresentation to claim the plan is "nearing completion". At best, the plan is merely in its infancy, and as of yet, has not even been presented to this council.

Additionally, what is currently being reviewed is only a "draft" plan, intended as guidance for a special committee charged with producing the final plan. A committee that, as of this date, has not been advertised for, much less appointed. Mr. Mayor, no one in their right mind could consider this plan "nearing completion".

Fiction: "A new bicycle path was approved and is now complete.", "The Carolina Sands sub-division Storm Drainage and Paving project has been completed.", and "The town has added an additional larger, more powerful pump (for the lake)."

Fact: Again, what they failed to mention is that it was the previous council that completed all the leg work, approvals, and funding for the bicycle path, the Carolina Sands project, and the new pump for the lake. Essentially, all this council had to do was watch the project progress without obstructing the process.

Fiction: "The Carolina Beach Police Department has received a \$12,000 grant... to purchase thermal imaging equipment..."

Fact: This is true, but council did not conceive this idea, direct the chief to pursue the grant, or participate in the process. This grant was written, applied for, and obtained by our police chief, Bill Younginer, and he is the one that should have received credit.

Fiction: "The process of updating the Land Use Plan is moving forward."

Fact: Dead wrong. Apparently the Mayor has missed these meetings, because no reasonable person could describe what is happening as forward movement. What we have is a big fat mess. Neither the committee, the staff,

nor the facilitator is on track with council's original direction. The previous P&Z commission spent a year and a half drafting this plan, and they had the benefit of being assisted by staff and two individuals from the Cape Fear Council of Government (CFGOG).

P&Z's work on the LUP alone took about 75 session hours, with research and homework being done, between those sessions. With 7 people on the P&Z, 3 on staff, and 2 from CFCOG, that totals nearly about 1,000 man hours spent on the existing plan. Yet the current committee seems intent on revising the entire plan in 4 or 5, two hour sessions. **Alan Gilbert's attempt to tweak the LUP to fit his agenda has become a train-wreck, and yet another waste of taxpayer dollars.** If Gilbert and the Mayor cannot see this for what it is, they have no business representing the citizens of this town in any capacity.

We could go on with more of these examples, as the majority of council's highlights has a story that refutes their pretense of accomplishment. In fact, most of the 30 accomplishments listed are nothing more than irresponsible embellishment.

Six of the highlights refer to projects or actions specifically initiated by the previous council. These items were put in place by the previous council and have merely followed their natural course of completion.

Many of the other highlights are simply the result of a normal course of town business. These are items that are schedule to happen regardless of who sits on council. **We wonder why this administration feels they deserve acknowledgment for meeting their commitment to the town** for normal daily activities. This council fired the previous town manager - and now they want acknowledgment for hiring a replacement? Give us a break. Who's responsibility did they think it was?

The balance of the highlights are a mixture of spin, issues discussed but not implemented (much less completed), and of course, a few actual accomplishments by our new councilmen.

They should be credited for things like installing new lights at the lake, hiring some police officers and firemen, creating an in-house payroll system, designating some free parking, and updating the Freeman Park ordinance. Oh! And let us not forget the Mayor's Water/Sewer Assurance Plan. This one page "plan" that the Mayor must have spent all of thirty minutes drafting. By the way, is your water better since the Mayor adopted his plan? Doubtful, since they seem to be having implementation problems.

Well, in fairness, so far this council has achieved goal #8 of that plan, which states that well site #3 should stay on line until other new water supplies become available. **Since no action was required to achieve this goal, our new councilmen excelled at that task.** But even with the excellent job done on goal #8, we are apparently still going backwards. Goal #5 of that same plan says they will "expand the equipment" and improve existing Lift Station #1. Oh, yea. As we previously mentioned - improvement efforts for Lift Station #1 have been halted.

The Mayor and his apparent self-appointed mouthpiece, Alan Gilbert, love to point out how other administrations have developed plans, but failed when it came to implementation of those plans.

So, let's see - our new councilmen have been in possession of the finished 2005 LUP draft for over a year. They have had control of the previously approved Harbor Management Plan for the same period. And the Mayor now has a Water/Sewer Assurance Plan in place. So, it only seems fair to ask how they are doing on implementation of those plans. Let's see... Oh, yea. None of the plans have been implemented! Does the term hot-air come to mind?

So, what's our point? Point: Our Mayor titled these items Council Highlights because he knew he could not call them accomplishments, for the simple reason that most of them are not. Nonetheless, it is obvious that he intended these items to be seen by the citizens, many of whom do not have first hand knowledge of these issues, as a list of accomplishments under his term. Not only is this transparent and devious, it is also a pathetic attempt to acquire some small sense of creditability.

If our new Mayor and new councilmen wanted to publish an accurate list of accomplishment, they could have done so using the heading "Town Council Accomplishments for 2006". Perhaps the reason they did not, is that their record is so poor, the publication would have been reduced to a business card size. This is a sad excuse for any council's first year of accomplishments.

We see these highlights as nothing more than self-serving, early campaign rhetoric, designed to create the pretense of accomplishment for potential voters. **The Mayor should be ashamed for taking credit for accomplishments by the police chief, fire chief, parks and recreation director, town manager, planning director, previous council, and others.**

It cost real money for staff's time to produce and print this dribble. This is a pitiful attempt to offset a year of disastrous actions on behalf of our new councilmen, by attempting to salvage their record on the backs of others, and **they used our taxpayer dollars to do it.**

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