

A View from the Other Side

January 12 2009 2009 a Difficult Year

Let me begin by thanking the Herald for picking up my option and agreeing to carry my column (“A View From the Other Side”). I also want to thank the Shelton Weekly for providing the vehicle that allowed this column to begin in the first place.

2009 is going to be a very challenging year for the City and its citizens. We begin with the fire at the High School. While it seems that the costs will be covered by insurance there are still many questions to be answered. We don't yet know what changes will need to be made to prevent this type of an incident from happening again. The State Fire Marshal's report indicates life safety code violations at the High School. These problems need to be addressed so there is still work to be done to bring the building up to code. One question that must be asked is why our City Fire Marshal did not identify the violations earlier? If he missed these violations, what other problems has he missed at the other City schools?

The budget for 2009-2010 will be a huge challenge. The Board of Education (BOE) has submitted a budget that has only a slight increase, less than 3% but the Mayor rejected the budget out of hand. The increase was because of medical insurance cost increases only. Unlike City employees, BOE employees pay for part of their health insurance. This is one reason the BOE was able to keep the request as low as it is. Perhaps the City will have a large surplus from over taxing us last year and can use that money to lower the impact of other cost increases this year. We seem to have a multi-million dollar surplus every year. Every citizen who cares about City services should be involved in the budget process.

The Board of Aldermen and the Mayor are bent on having a “do-over” on the bond referendum for the infrastructure cost for Canal Street. They seem to think that the citizens didn't understand the issue last November when it was defeated. So we will most likely vote again on bonding infrastructure improvements. The citizens solidly rejected the bonding, however the City leaders think spending \$10,000 for a special election and additional money on informing us is what is needed. Last year the Mayor said that one of the reasons for the property tax increase was because of the increased cost to service the City's debt. Now he and the BOA want us to increase our debt by \$2 million more. What will happen to our taxes then?

This fall we will have citywide elections. The Democratic Party will be running a full slate of qualified candidates and will offer some new ideas and leadership. We will offer the change that the City needs.

All of the above will occur with the dark cloud of the ongoing Federal corruption investigations. We may finally officially know who “Public Official #1” is. Maybe that person will be charged. No one is sure how many more will be charged. Will members of Planning and Zoning or other City commissions be charged as well? Regardless, the citizens are entitled to a government free of corruption.

By David M. Gioiello, Jr., Chairman, Shelton Democratic Town Committee

A View from the Other Side

December 5, 2008 We Just Don't Understand

There is so much to discuss in this week's article. I could write pages about the ongoing investigations of criminal wrong doing here in Shelton. Rather than speculate about who will or will not be charged, I will offer a few thoughts. First, we as citizens are entitled to a government that treats all its citizens fairly. No one should be able to buy favors. Second, our elected and appointed officials have a sacred trust to the citizens to conduct themselves both within the law and ethically as well. Finally, it saddens me to hear that some people don't care how much some politician got paid to help a developer as long as their taxes are kept low.

It seems that those involved in the recent election are math challenged. Now we find out that the bond issue for improvements on Canal Street was defeated, not by small amount but by more than 1000 votes. The Mayor, the Board of Aldermen and the SEDC are all upset and now are unsure what to do. There is talk of a "do over". You know like when we were kids and didn't like the outcome of a time at bat we would get a "do over". Alderman Perrillo thinks that we citizens didn't really understand what we were voting on and that is why the bond issue failed. Has it ever occurred to our city leaders that the citizens knew full well what they were voting on and just said NO? Could it be that the citizens think that the developers that are in position to make million of dollars in profit should help pick up the cost of improving the street? Look at the additional load the apartments and condos will place on the city waste treatment plant. We all are paying for those upgrades yet all of us don't directly benefit from the plant. Yes, we needed to do it but who is benefiting the most? When Mr. Scinto needed to tie into the sewer system he offered to help cover some of the additional costs. Maybe we should ask the downtown developers to pick up some of the costs for the road and infrastructure improvements that are needed. Yes, we may lose some State and Federal grant money but in these economic times can the City add another three million dollars of new debt? Just last year the Mayor said that one of the reasons that taxes had to be raised was because of the increase cost in servicing the City's debt. We seem to borrow every year to pay for items that we should budget for in the City's regular budget. When will this borrowing stop? Yes we all borrow to purchase large items like homes and cars, but we should borrow to buy our food or heat our homes? If we can't afford it then perhaps we should not do it. Regular maintenance of City roads and buildings is a requirement, but it is one that we should budget for regularly. We should stop saving money by not maintaining our infrastructure so we can pay big bucks when we have to do a major overhaul instead. Do you run your household that way?