

New Harbor Board members become politicians at the speed of light

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Opinion

I'm not sure what happens to newly elected officials who display certain convictions prior to being elected, then transform instantly into the consummate politician of which they had previously held with such disdain. Our newly elected harbor commissioners managed the feat in less than two public meetings.

While I was unable to attend the meeting where passage of the reins of power took place, I have been regaled with descriptions of a circus clown vehicle careening down a hill, headed towards the water, being driven by a three-year-old child suitably dressed and made up in clown costume.

The most recent meeting of the Crescent City Harbor District was a much more subdued affair. Unfortunately for the health and welfare of the Harbor itself, it would appear not much has changed with the incoming tide. New Board members John Evans, Dan Schmidt, and Annie Nehmer have quickly shed their pre-election outer wear and assumed the finery of a well-heeled politician. It was very clear the new Commission has deluded itself into believing, applying and subsequently receiving larger amounts of grant funding is the only pathway to resuscitating the financially-strapped Harbor. While this tactic might work to clear away a few of the Harbor's immediate troubles, quite often the lure of "free" dollars leads to matching funds or projects which quickly deteriorate in our harsh climate and lead to near future costly tasks of maintenance and replacement. Does anybody remember the solar panel fiasco?

The problems that the Harbor faces have escalated over the past two decades and may be insurmountable with obstacles both of their own making and with State and Federal bureaucracies piling on. Simple government-spawned inflation and regulation is likely the largest mountain the harbor must climb. This has decimated the local commercial fisheries which at one time supported much of the cost of having a harbor.

Grant funding, currently being pursued with fervor will become more competitive for fewer dollars, then near impossible to acquire at all. The Harbor cannot survive on grant funding alone as there are too few dollars to go around and the Harbor's financial troubles exceed any realistic expectation more and more grant funding will ultimately prevail.

Initially, there was hope for the Commission when a simple ask by the local Chamber of Commerce for \$10,000 was rebuffed, citing the constraints of an empty Harbor District wallet. The euphoria was short lived, when possible dollar amounts of millions were waved under the noses of the Commissioners. Gone were the pre-election principles of modest financial reform at 186,000 miles per second. Money to spend was irresistible. Politicians were born with the fresh possibility of money to squander, palaces and castles to be built, and a legacy to create. The words of praise for tasks completed, back-slapping, and a general sense of euphoria for what might be.

Unfortunately, harsh facts of reality present may be Crescent City cannot really afford a harbor at all, at least one operated by a Board of Commissioners. Certainly, there is not much chance for a Commission populated by local citizens transformed at the speed of light into politicians to succeed, where actual people with success in business might prevail. Such as it is, there are three new commissioners, and a new harbormaster, but not much has really changed. Is the Harbor Commission on the path at the speed of light of ending up on the back of the clown car as it plunges off Citizens Dock into the under-dredged waters of Crescent City Harbor? Speed of light? Only time will tell.