

# TOWN CRIER

This is the second issue of what will be a periodic communication to the citizens of Cape Charles. **John Burdiss is solely responsible for the content.**

## Topics addressed in this issue (June 14, 2007) are:

1. **Is the fire out yet?**
2. **Notable agenda items at the 6/12/07 council meeting.**
3. **Some big issues we must deal with in the future.**
4. **Welcome to the new member of council.**
5. **Constituents are invited.**

## *Is the fire out yet?*

### **Part deux: The Town of Cape Charles (Town) & the Cape Charles Volunteer Fire Company (Fire Company).**

1. Depending upon who is telling the story and when it was told:
  - a. The “Town” doesn’t appreciate the Fire Company & its members.
  - b. The whole “space” issue was contrived to serve other plans.
  - c. Certain people weren’t very polite in how they delivered the Town’s message.
  - d. A deal was made with the devil over the \$145k fire truck.
  - e. The real issue about the space, when first addressed the fall of 2006 was:
    - i. The problems with “moving” the communications room, then it became:
      1. A deal is a deal – even though no one could document the “deal”.
      2. Every inch of space is absolutely needed by the Fire Company for storage for the antique fire engine; garage space for the “chief’s” car and a “brush truck” and a ...?
2. To my personal knowledge:
  - a. I know of no one, particularly myself, persons on Council or otherwise who doesn’t appreciate the Fire Company & its members and the critical work that they do.
    - i. Do I appreciate their absolute unwillingness to negotiate and their penchant for demonizing those who don’t agree 100% with them? No.
  - b. The “space” issue was and is real, but thankfully the “Town” has figured out other ways to solve its needs for now.
  - c. Were the notices as kind as they may have been; perhaps not, but there was no intention to be anything but businesslike.
3. Please remember that despite the benefits to the Town and its citizens of all the things the Fire Company has done, is doing and will do, for the Town and its Citizens – the Fire Company is not a department of the Town. It is an independent organization; if it were a department, it would have to respond to the Town Manager and Council.
4. Despite the independent status of the Fire Company, the Town government has shown consistent and significant support for them in the past, currently and will do so in the future.

- a. In addition to the \$145k fire truck – no strings attached – over the last three years, the Town has provided in excess of \$60k in funds via grants the Town has enabled and building fees the Town dedicates to the Fire Company.
  - b. Employees of the Town are by policy encouraged to respond to alarms while on duty for the Town. There are currently at least 5 full-time Town employees who are also firemen, and several other Town employees who are Fire Company members.
5. Town & Fire Company are totally independent of each other - we do not commingle our funds and we are run as totally independent bodies.
  6. Fire Company relies on volunteers – who do wonderful and thankless work and upon donations (or fund raisers - primarily) to operate.
  7. I continue to implore the Fire Company to put some balance in this situation, now and in the future. \$145,000 is by no means a small gift, and then there is the effectively “free” use of Town’s property for the past number of years. The Town’s resources are finite; the Fire Company should have tried to accommodate the Town with a reasonable response to the Town’s need for space in return for the Town’s enormous support of the Fire Company.

<b>Notable agenda items at the June 12, 2007 meeting of Town Council</b>
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6. **Old Business – all of these items were approved:**

\*A. Nuisance Ordinance Amendment – allows for fines/penalties to encourage recalcitrant property owners to comply with existing ordinances. Burdiss Yes.

\*C. Revised Utilities Rates & Revised Water & Wastewater Connection Charges. The utilities rates also relate to the necessary means to balance the budget in those departments which are required to be self sustaining. The connection fees relate to our staggering need to begin to provide for long term funding of capital needs. While I proposed a “mid-point” of \$7,000 vs. the recommend \$10,047 and the current \$4,000, there were not enough votes to pass that as a compromise. Having said that, I could not support waiting to impose any increase, and I joined 2 other council members and the mayor (who bravely broke the tie) when the \$10,047 alternative was voted on a 2<sup>nd</sup> time.

\*D. Revised Meals Tax & \*E. Short-Term Rental Tax: as previously stated, these relate to part of the necessary means to balance the budget. Burdiss Yes.

\*F. Adopt Draft Budget – This is the **“key”** document that outlines how the Town expects to collect revenues and make expenditures in the fiscal period from July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008. Burdiss Yes. Total budget is about \$4 million; split evenly between general fund revenues and expenses & other funds, including sanitation, harbor, water & waster water; see Town website.

Comments:

A very important point about the now approved connection fees (\*C) is that they have been in fact been studied exhaustively and increases are necessary to fund the spending needed for water and sewer plant upgrades and/or expansion. The only reason I proposed the mid-point was that the timing of the upgrades and expansion are not known, and in fact can’t be known for quite some time; but, the fact is, the town will have huge obligations to meet no matter when the actual spending comes, and with our limited reserves – waiting to begin the funding is simply not in the best interests of the town.

I also heard cogent presentations and reasonable opposition to the meals tax increase from 4 – 5% (\*D) and the establishment of a 1% (\*E) short term rental tax (golf carts, scooters, kayaks, etc.). The bulk of these types of funds now received are used to pay debt related to the

breakwaters and beach improvement. As I have said, these are also important building blocks in acquiring the funds needed to balance the budget, with those funds dedicated to tourism, promotion and/or recreation. I am optimistic that those in opposition will not find the negative impacts they foresee, but I must emphasize the need for funding.

Since the last council essentially gave us an unfunded obligation in the form of the \$145,000 fire truck, you will recall that the "current" budget (the one we inherited for this fiscal year which ends 06/30/2007) was amended in these areas:

- a. Cape Charles High School renovation – eliminated \$70,000 in budget
- b. New park, open space and ball fields – eliminated \$57,000 in budget
- c. Skateboard park – eliminated \$7,000 in budget
- d. Volleyball, softball & soccer apparatus – eliminated \$10,000 in budget

As you can see, \$74,000 in youth and/or recreation funds were absorbed in the fire truck. Also, council was admonished to work on the Cape Charles High School and leave the Fire Company alone regarding the 1<sup>st</sup> floor space. Ironically, had we not given the \$145,000 to the fire company, perhaps we could have done so.

### **There are BIG issues – like Town property.**

To reinvigorate the work needed to deal with current and future needs for Town office space and other space, and the Cape Charles High School, the Mayor has formed a standing committee on Town real estate. The prior council was moving toward renovating the old school for municipal space. The costs were estimated to be \$4 – 5 million, which net of possible grants and other funds would still leave \$2 – 3 million in debt.

A temporary committee formed last year from this council recommended against such a plan – reasons included: flooding which isolates the old school; costs; limited parking; location in a residential neighborhood, increasing traffic on interior streets; and so on.

The new standing R/E committee will include Councilman Brown, staff members, Tom Bonadeo from the Planning Commission, and others. The finance committee will work arm in arm with them. Please get involved and share your ideas; help us deal responsibly with our current and future space needs and with the old school, among other BIG issues we face.

*Welcome to new Council member Melvin Dudley. Melvin is a tireless volunteer and a man of integrity. I am sure that he will be an analytical, objective voice on council and one who can disagree without being disagreeable. Kudos to Mayor Sullivan for helping bring Melvin on board.*

### **You are invited!**

Please join me at my office – 117 Mason Ave., Suite E (next to Kelly's Pub) from 5:15 – 6:15 PM on Tuesday, June 26<sup>th</sup>. Come, voice opinions, ask questions and learn more about what your Town government and your Council are doing to honor our duty to you by always striving to serve the best interests of the Town with each action we take. Your responses and/or inquiries to anything in the Town Crier or about "Town" business are welcome at [johnburdiss@baycrk.net](mailto:johnburdiss@baycrk.net)