

VOTE

for Responsible Leadership

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Dear Citizen of Collegedale,

February 14, 2005

"In public it is hard for politicians to say things their backers don't already agree with. Yet doing just that constitutes leadership" This statement caught my attention when I read it in the journal, *The Atlantic*, January/February 2005 issue, on page 82.

As many of you already know, I am a candidate for the Collegedale City Commission. Some of you have my position paper, dated January 12, which I handed to you at your home. That letter is still available for those who don't have a copy. **All of my comments in this letter have to do with setting priorities and saving or spending money.** I am not backing off any of my positions in the first letter, though I will comment further on my opposition to nonresident property owners being given a vote. After that, I will comment on the campaign letter from "The Team"— (that is, my three opponents).

At a recent Commission meeting a couple of families came to complain about a house in their neighborhood. It seems that the house had been leased to a university student by the owner who resides in another state. This student had allowed about ten other students to move into the house, thus causing a massive parking problem in the neighborhood. Cars were parked all over lawns and up and down both sides of the street making the street impassable at times and very unsafe.

As of the date of the Commission meeting three things happened involving the city:

1. The Commissioners and City Manager expressed their most heartfelt sympathy for the neighbors.
2. The City had sent the police into the neighborhood where cars belonging to the neighbors were given tickets for being parked in the street because they were unable to get in their own driveways due to the congestion caused by the problem house.
3. The Commissioners had previously voted to give this irresponsible absentee landlord a vote in our local elections. This person is mismanaging his property and obviously has no regard for the health and safety concerns of adjoining owners.

I don't believe that absentee landlords, slumlords and irresponsible developers who simply own a tract of land (and we have quite a few people in all three categories) ought to be voting in our elections. Such people quite often have just one objective — **making money** — and have no other interest in this city.

Now to the letter from "The Team." They begin by telling us that "Property Taxes **decreased**" (emphasis theirs). Yes, property taxes did decrease in one of the last four years, but not by much. But the real issue is what they are planning to **spend** in the next four years.

So, here is the list of what "The Team" is proposing to spend. What "The Team" isn't telling you about is what the City **MUST** spend in the next four years, as well as other spending requests by citizens and citizen groups.

Team Proposals

1. Two more sections of Greenway
2. Senior Citizen Park
3. \$5,839,150 for sewer projects. This figure does not include the cost for obtaining easements.

Other Needs and Commitments

4. \$7,500 was just voted out of the Sales Tax Fund for exclusive rights for a bronze statue for the Veterans Park.
5. The County wants to build a concession stand and bathrooms at the new ballfields. The estimated cost — \$150,000.

6. I live on University Drive. This road, from the corner near Spalding School to the city line on Standifer Gap Road, is badly cracked and will surely need to be repaired before four more years pass. This is not a short stretch of highway. There are other roads that also need repairing, and areas that need more street lighting. I see these road costs as necessary, not discretionary.

Citizen and Citizen Group Requests

7. \$20,000 City subsidy for Collegedale Recreational Association. We are currently providing a \$15,000 per year subsidy.
8. \$35,000 to \$120,000 for a skateboard park. These figures do not include the cost of land or a concrete slab on which the park is to be constructed.
9. A request made, but ignored by the City, some years ago for bike lanes on some public roads and also bike trails. No current cost estimate.

I am going to practice "tough-love" (because I do love our city and citizens), and say, flat out, that I do not believe that the Commission can deliver even half of what is being proposed. They cannot do it without **dramatically** raising property taxes, or bankrupting the City and burying our younger citizens under a mountain of future public debt.

Before sorting all this out in more detail, I want to relate that I see part of the solution as having the City get out of the entertainment, recreation, and monument building businesses.

1. Two more sections of Greenway is something that I really, really want personally. However, as a Commissioner, I will not vote for this unless I am certain that it can be done without incurring debt for the City. This includes factoring in future maintenance costs.
2. I have no objection for the City to donate the land for a Senior Citizen Park. However, the construction costs, management, and maintenance will have to be funded privately, by those who want such a facility.
3. Next is the question of millions of dollars of loans (bonds) for sewer projects. Some of what I am going to write is not going to be popular with some people. But, it is time to face reality. If you live in certain neighborhoods, you know we need the sewers. But the projects have been seriously mismanaged.

A plan and timetable for six sewer projects was drawn up in July of 2003. A seventh project was recently added. The first project was to be completed by December 2004. Except for planning, it hasn't been started yet. Two other projects were to have been finished by April 2005, but neither has been started. It was only in late December, after it became clear that they were going to be opposed by me for re-election, that the Commissioners decided they needed to appear to be doing something about sewers. Why have the Commissioners been dragging their feet? Part of the reason is that Mayor Bill Hulsey has on several occasions expressed concern about how the City is going to be sure it has the money to pay back the loans. Mayor Hulsey is to be commended.

Now I have mentioned mismanagement. On the morning of February 7, 2005, I met with City Manager Carol Mason in her office. I mentioned that I remembered a Sewer Availability fee being passed by the Commission several years ago and that I was surprised to hear at a recent workshop that the fee was not being collected. Ms. Mason then told me that the Commission did not want this collected.

After my having raised the issue, the matter of the Sewer Availability fee mysteriously appeared on the agenda for the Commission meeting that evening. The Commissioners quickly voted to start imposing the fee. So, something that should have been done during the first month of the incumbants' term has finally gotten done in the **last** month of their term before seeking re-election. Their negligence has resulted in the loss of thousands of dollars for our sewer fund. The Commissioners tried to trivialize the amount at their meeting, but it is not trivial.

4. Next we have the question of the \$20,000 subsidy for the Collegedale Recreational Association. I discussed this request at length with Carol Mason in our meeting. Quite coincidentally, Dr. Phil Garver made a presentation at the Commission meeting that night. The Commissioners asked many good questions and much was said. I appreciated Dr. Garver's honesty in trying to answer. The Commission has been giving the Association a \$15,000 annual subsidy for at least 10 years and smaller subsidies for at least 10 years before that. A Commissioner asked if he could see the financial records for the past three years and was told by Dr. Garver that record keeping was so shoddy prior to the current year that no useful records are available. A Commissioner stated that the local Association is the only one he knows of where the Association buys players' uniforms (at a cost of about \$8000 per year) instead of having the players, parents, or sponsors buy the uniforms. Dr. Garver's answer was that Collegedale's Association is quite unique (my reaction: "Obviously"), and that parents like things the way they are (my reaction: "Of course"). A Commissioner stated that all the associations he was familiar with, or had talked with, were staffed by all volunteers. Dr. Garver stated that Collegedale could not find enough adults to volunteer and therefore had to create three paid positions. Having just recently received the \$15,000 for 2004-2005, Dr. Garver said the Association still had \$3000+ debt and asked the city for a bailout. The Commission on February 7 voted for this bailout with only Commissioner Turner having the courage to vote "No". Dr. Garver also admitted that in the past the Association had not tried very hard to recruit team sponsors to help with costs, but pledged to do better in the future. On top of all this, there are serious church/state issues involved with the present arrangement. John Turner (not up for re-election) understands this. Tim Johnson (up for re-election) seems to be coming around to the same view. The three other Commissioners, however, have refused to face up to the problem and the conflicting interests. For all the reasons stated in this letter, I believe the city needs to disassociate itself from the Collegedale Recreational Association. I recommend a "humane" solution, however. Not just cutting them off.
5. Next we have the matter of the skateboard park. My position is about the same as with the Senior Citizen Park. If the City can donate same land, I have no problem with that. But, funds for construction, management, and maintenance will have to come from fund raising. If the young people and interested adults want to begin fund raising, I will personally pledge \$300 by June 30, 2005, because I would like to see this project move forward.
6. I see bike lanes and trails as part of our transportation system. If someone rides a bicycle rather than driving an automobile it reduces the use of oil and gasoline, improves air quality, makes for less wear-and-tear on roads, etc. However, other transportation needs, sewers, and necessary city services obviously have precedence.
7. Now about the statue for the Veterans Park. If I understand things correctly, the fee for creating the sculpture is being paid for privately. I never have a problem with using private funds. I am pleased with our Veterans Park, including our desire to honor medics. However, the \$7500 the Commissioners voted to pay so that the sculpture cannot be duplicated and sold elsewhere does not set well with this citizen. Two words come to my mind — "pride" and "vanity". It is as though we are trying to exalt ourselves above other cities. Whatever happened to the notion of "humility?" Just a suggestion: how about repealing the vote of \$7500 for the fee and giving the money to a veteran's hospital or something similar?
8. Finally, we need to tell Hamilton County to scale back their plans to spend \$150,000 for a concession stand and bathrooms. What kind of a concession stand is this going to be anyway? Are these bathrooms going to have gold plated fixtures or what?

I urge those wishing for me to be elected, to vote only for me. My opponents are urging their supporters to vote for them as a block. However, if you vote for any of them, it will deplete my chances of winning. Remember, if all of the incumbants win they will be in a position to control the Commission for the next four years. That is a long time!

Thank you for your patience in reading this letter, and for supporting my candidacy. If you have any questions or comments, or if you would like to have a yard sign please call me.

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