



## ***THE ROAD AHEAD—Eric Sauder***

We need a course change. Our focus has been on how to make money off of Ocean City in the short term—where we can build next—how much inventory we'll have to sell this year. Instead we should be focusing on how to make Ocean City both a better place to live and vacation. Isn't that the purpose of a municipal government? Taking such a short sighted approach can only lead to a future defined by accident. If you need proof of that think of how Ocean City has changed over the past decade or two. Is it a better place to live or vacation today?

Many would say that the future is already determined—that we passed a tipping point—that there's nothing to do now but keep on keeping on. We had our opportunities to chart a different course, but chose instead the path to short-term profitability. Hey, it might be true that it's already too late, but those that proclaim it the loudest are those who benefit the most from the old "tried & true"—the "here a duplex, there a duplex, everywhere a duplex" crowd. If that's where the money is it's also what created the Ocean City we know today.

What follows is a vision I'm skeptical will ever exist. You can call it a dream if you like; yet, if it's a dream that we share, and if we all take a stake in it, some part of it may come true.

Two factors came into play to provide the opportunity I refer to. The first was loss of commercial business. It's bad enough losing businesses; but, what's worse is rezoning that commercial land for yet more high-density, residential development. The second factor was decline in property values. Taken together they offered an opportunity. A barrier was lowered by the (relatively) lower cost of land acquisition.

One opportunity was to develop traditional, single-family neighborhoods that are more appealing as residences. Remember single family? It was the buzzword at the last ward election. From single-family came coastal cottage then condominiums. The tune is the same but the words have changed to "here a condo, there a condo, everywhere a condo". That lower cost of acquisition only resulted in even greater density and profits for the developer.

The second opportunity was to increase open space. Two of those commercial parcels along Haven Avenue could have been converted to park land. I attended an Environmental Commission meeting where the concept of a linear park was proposed. What better place for park land than there? Can you imagine a park within walking distance of virtually every home in Ocean City? The wildlife preserve towards the south end runs along Haven, and with good reason. It is one of the lowest areas on the island and is subject to recurring flooding. Much better I think to have converted that land to open space than to build housing in a swamp. So much for missed opportunities.

Our most pressing problem is the loss of residents. Our population decreased from 17,000 to 11,000 as of the last census. A loss of residents, (and consumer demand) results in a corresponding loss of businesses. A thriving business environment is the backbone of any community. It's difficult to attract residents without a commercial base, and difficult to retain commercial without a stable market for goods and services. We're losing both, and as a result, Ocean City is a dying community. Why aren't we addressing this?

If we're going to turn things around, we need to play to our strengths. Ocean City is primarily a retirement community. We should be promoting Ocean City, not only as a place to vacation, but as a place to retire to. To that end we should be building more modest single-family (retirement) homes.

If we can build up our population, we'll create demand for commercial. We don't need to subsidize commercial investment. We need to create demand for it. In time, we might be able to attract working families too—business owners and job opportunities. Once commercial is converted to residential there's no turning back. What we're doing is selling off our future as a community. People do not want to live where there's an absence of goods and services; of places to go and things to do.

The remaining challenge is to find a way to make Ocean City a destination in the off-season. I'm not sure how we can accomplish this, but I am sure that building more vacation homes isn't the solution. Word is the "Solaris" is back on. Doubtless the provisions of the new Hospitality zone have made it viable. What is contemplated is a high rise condominium complex in the parking lot adjacent to the Flanders. Imagine instead an all season resort with conference rooms. The Flanders is probably the closest thing we have to a conference center. That parking lot would be a natural location for a convention complex.

My next installment will make some specific suggestions as to how to make Ocean City a better place to live and vacation. If you were to ask me, I would say that Ocean City peaked some 20 years ago and has been in decline ever since. If we don't move forward, we'll fall behind. How can we ensure that Ocean City remains a first class resort?

## *AN EDITORIAL—Jim Tweed*

Upton Sinclair once observed “it is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.” I have never known anyone honest enough to admit they were overpaid. Instead we all give plenty of reasons why we deserve every cent. An investment banker or derivatives trader making multimillion dollar bonuses by making bets with other peoples’ money and moving paper will tell you he’s worth it. A laborer doing as little as he can get away with will feel entitled to his paycheck just for showing up. A teacher with tenure will believe they are entitled to keep their job whether they bring value to the classroom or not. “Entitlement” knows no class.

If you’ve been a part of Ocean City for the past few decades then you’ve probably had the opportunity to gorge on some easy money. I think developers building, realtors selling, owners cashing, and employees receiving are all legal, right and good activities. It’s the excess that tempts us not to think things through. I don’t think the officials who negotiated and approved the contracts that offered the raises, escalated the health benefits, and saddled our future with Cadillac retirement programs were bad people. They were good people who did not think long term because they didn’t want to spoil the “ratables party.” It was easy not to think about how fast check-valves, roads, alleys, boardwalks, and bulkheads age. And no one who lives at the beach wants to think that rising sea levels is a bigger problem which a little more dredging and pumping can’t fix.

Get real. We are at the cross-roads (Capital infrastructure investment vs. operational services). It calls for leadership unafraid of telling us truths we’d rather not hear. And that’s what real leaders do. The easy part is rallying around more infrastructure investment. The hard part is speaking truth to the Unions because they bite back.

But Unions have betrayed their own. Their bargaining units overreached for decades while politicians joined the feeding frenzy at the public trough in exchange for votes. The saddest part is that many employees at the bottom of the wage scale are still underpaid. Meanwhile Union leaders play victim while they defend work rules that protect poor performance. They would rather take layoffs than change seniority rules. Making it hard to fire a poor performer does not help the employer or the good employees. Have you ever noticed that sometimes it’s the biggest miscreants who get the most indignant over an honest performance evaluation?

Those of you who have lived your lives in the private sector just have to listen to Union positions for the proof you need. Ask yourself why unions fiercely fight against replacing seniority rules with layoffs based on performance? When a teacher bristles over some defect in a formula for merit pay, ask yourself if it’s the imperfection of the formula, or they just don’t like the idea of competing with another teacher who might be more ambitious to become a better teacher. My son-in-law (a homicide detective) once correctly pointed out to me that our police and firemen put their lives on the line for us. I respectfully asked him if he was willing to let a free labor marketplace determine what fair compensation for that service should be.

Public employees need only look to the private sector to see the cost of denying reality. When the bloated costs of pensions and health benefits make corporations uncompetitive the only way to survive is bankruptcy and reorganization. If that’s the only way to cut loose short sighted labor contracts, that’s what happens .....eventually.

It doesn’t have to be that way. Elections give taxpayers the opportunity to “fire” office holders who don’t lead. Public employees could do the same with their unions.

**EDUCATIONAL REVIEW - Vic Staniec**

The three-year terms of three Ocean City School Board members have expired. School Board president, Brenda Moiso and Lloyd Hayes chose not to seek re-election. Peter Madden was the only candidate to file papers to run in the election, and was elected unopposed. Jon Batistini collected the most write-in votes and was also elected to the Board . Since Greg Donohue resigned from the Board before his term was up and a special election was held, Jon Batistini won this one-year term but chose to accept the three-year term instead. The School Board was then required to fill this position and Cecilia Gallelli-Keys was selected. Joe Clark was elected as the new School Board President and Tom Oves was elected as Vice President.

The School Board voted to spend \$6.6m for repairs to the Primary School. The 27-year old roof and HVAC systems will be replaced, along with adding new thermal pane windows and doors. A vote will be held from 3:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M. on March 11, 2014 to approve the bond issue needed to fund this project; however, we still do not know the exact amount needed because we are awaiting State approval of a \$2.4m grant. The Board also approved spending \$2.9m to replace the HVAC system in the High School adding de-humidifiers to prevent future mold problems. The School Board currently has \$3.9m in its capital reserve budget. It does not need tax payer approval for this project which is to be completed during the summer of 2014.

**FROM THE TREASURER— Bill Hartranft**

Financially, our organization is in very good shape.. Sentinel advertising seems to have served us well by stirring the City Administration’s interest in our observations as evidenced by the recent public safety workshops with Police and Fire.

Your contributions for 2013 have made it possible for us to cover all of our printing, advertising and insurance expenses, etc as well as contributions to our community.

**FROM THE SECRETARY— Sheila Hartranft**

As you have probably already noticed, our web site is in serious need of updating. Unfortunately, the person who set the site up and kept it current is no longer available to volunteer their time and expertise, and we do not have the necessary password to edit the site or access the e-mail. Therefore, consider this a cry for help. If anyone out there can help us accomplish this or set up a new web site, Fairness In Taxes would very grateful.

In the meantime, please feel free to direct your questions, ideas and/or concerns directly to me, the Secretary via the Fairness In Taxes hotline, my phone number 609-814-0056 or via e-mail at silemh@yahoo.com I will ensure they are directed to the appropriate individuals.

**ONCE AGAIN, IT IS TIME FOR MEMBERSHIP DUES.  
THEY ARE \$15.00 PER MEMBER HOUSEHOLD  
FOR THE YEAR. A RETURN ENVELOPE IS EN-  
CLOSED FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE.**

***OUR SINCERE THANKS FOR YOUR  
CONTINUED SUPPORT.***

*The Fairness In Taxes Annual Business Meeting was held on Friday, December 6, 2013. The following members were nominated and unanimously accepted to serve on the Board:*

<i>Michael Hinchman</i>	<i>President</i>
<i>Joe Somerville</i>	<i>Vice President</i>
<i>Bill Hartranft</i>	<i>Treasurer</i>
<i>Sheila Hartranft</i>	<i>Secretary</i>

*Members-at-Large*

<i>Leo Burke</i>	<i>Eric Sauder</i>
<i>Don Kerns</i>	<i>Vic Staniec</i>
<i>Dale Nicholas</i>	<i>Jim Tweed</i>

*Fairness In Taxes meetings are held on the first Friday of each month as follows:*

*Time        3:00 P.M.*  
*Place:      Ocean City Library*  
*7th Street & Haven Avenue*  
*Room #110*

*Very often we have guest speakers from various Ocean City municipal offices and local companies, providing valuable and vibrant dialogue among all attendees, and information on how your tax dollars are being spent.*

*We would love to see you there!*

## ***FAIRNESS IN TAXES***

***P.O. Box 565***

**Ocean City, NJ 08226-0565**

### **FAIRNESS IN TAXES**

Is organized for the purpose of serving the taxpayers and residents of Ocean City, NJ as an advisory and fact finding group in areas such as city budget, school board budget, taxes and other related civic activity in the interests of owners of real estate in Ocean City.

Hotline 609 398-6411

Email [www.fairnessintaxes.com](http://www.fairnessintaxes.com) and select Contact Us.

**Temporarily out of service.)**

Please notify us of any address changes

***FAIRNESS IN TAXES WEBSITE (Temporarily out of service.)***

***[www.fairnessintaxes.com](http://www.fairnessintaxes.com)***

***CHECK FOR UPDATED INFORMATION!!***

### **A list of phone numbers of Council Members and the Mayor is as follows: (area code 609)**

<b>1st Ward</b>	Michael DeVlieger	861 Asbury Avenue	231-8987	mdevlieger@ocnj.us
<b>At-Large</b>	Scott Ping	5415 Haven Avenue	399-0413	Scottping2006@yahoo.com
<b>At-Large</b>	Michael Allegretto	1423 Simpson Avenue	432-8739	Mike@michaelallegretto.com
<b>2nd Ward</b>	Antwan L. McClellan	448 West Avenue	545-7660	amcclellan@ocnj.us
<b>Mayor</b>	Jay Gillian	861 Asbury Avenue	525-9323	jgillian@ocnj.us
<b>At-Large</b>	Keith Hartzell	720 Asbury Avenue	399-5324	keithhartzell@hotmail.com
<b>3rd Ward</b>	Tony Wilson	23 West 15th Street	363-8669	awilson@ocnj.us
<b>4th Ward</b>	Peter J. Guinosso	4815 Central Avenue	398-2560	pguinosso@ocnj.us

Regular council meetings are held the 2nd & 4th Thursday of every month @ 7PM in Council Chambers @ City Hall.