

DDA still doesn't get it

A gaggle that likes to think of themselves as the "glass half-full" group have a hard time admitting that their peers now look at them as a "glass half-empty" gang.

Instead of accepting the recent defeat of the additional ten mills of property tax on downtown buildings and land as a wake-up call, the DDA board continues to think of their loss as an aberration. They grasp at straws as to why the measure was defeated after several consecutive wins.

Some who serve on the current board of directors of the Downtown Development Authority are well-meaning. Almost none have any retail experience and don't know how to draw a crowd. How to promote. To them, if four people come to court or watch them present oral arguments at the Supreme Court, they've drawn a crowd.

A recent DDA newsletter began: "As you are undoubtedly aware, the DDA Mill levy was narrowly defeated by 4 votes in the recent election."

While the vote margin of defeat may seem "narrow" to insiders, the loss was a devastating rejection (huge) of the board and longtime executive director.

As shown on these pages recently, it appears that many who have supported the additional ten mills of property tax on their property now oppose it. Obviously, because the measure was approved so many times, it wasn't about the money. About the cost to them. It was about the failure of the current group that had a hand in the misdirection of the DDA.

The recent newsletter from the DDA Czar raised the question of "the end of the DDA." Only a weak-kneed City governing body or a referendum can bring an end to the DDA. The loss did spell the need for a different direction and certainly indicated that downtown property owners do not approve of what has been done with the money paid into the DDA coffers as a result of this ten mill property tax. And sales taxes.

The money has been poorly spent and some would say it has been squandered. Primarily used for payroll with no meaningful or visible results, both the property tax and the TIF district sales taxes provided a huge source of revenue that could have been used to slow down the deterioration of the downtown and may even, with more capable and experienced leadership from the board and a hard-working and ambitious executive director, have brought new businesses into the District instead of just standing idly by as business after business, large and small, new and old, departed by moving out of downtown or failing and closing.

The newsletter pointed out that the 50 votes cast in opposition represented "about 15 percent of the eligible votes" but did not point out that the 46 votes in favor was a still lower percent. 14%.

In two elections before this one in 2009, the DDA board never questioned whether gaining approval from less than one quarter of the downtown properties reflected a high level of support for their efforts. No, when they garnered but 23% of the eligible votes to *extend* the property tax, they considered it a resounding win.

Finally, after losing about 1/4 of their annual revenue, now they want to know what the downtown property owners think? It's interesting that those thoughts were not important so long as enough headnodders voted to approve each special election since 1994.

The newsletter: "Simply put, the defeat of the mill levy was either a result of dissatisfaction that accurately represents the whole, or was the result of complacency, apathy, bad weather on election day, the national economy, busy schedules or a combination of these factors."

Again, enough excuses were offered to explain away everything when what it was was a simple repudiation of the efforts of this DDA board and executive director.

After speaking with a great number of downtown property owners, I can tell the DDA board that apathy was on the prevailing side also. A number of dissatisfied property owners did not vote. Why? Some said they just forgot about the election. Some said they didn't think it would make any difference - that the election always won overwhelmingly (partially because one supportive property owner "condo'd" a building that is not a legal condo and gained ten votes by doing that). And some felt defeated. They feel it doesn't make any difference whether the ten mill tax is assessed or not. That nothing positive, meaningful or constructive can come from a DDA board that knows nothing about retail or promotion.

The question is posed in the newsletter about whether downtown property owners "favor a DDA," and finally is asking stakeholders what the primary focus of the organization should be. Where have these people been? Haven't they seen the rapid and steady exodus of businesses from the downtown with few new businesses moving into the area?

Upper story legal and financial offices don't provide much of a view of the street. And they were evidently misled by the vocal support at their meetings from tenants. Tenants should have a voice. They may be the retailers, restaurateurs and lodging people who actually see, on a daily basis, what has happened to the downtown. But, for the DDA board to be deceived into thinking there was a groundswell of support for the ten mill property tax when the supportive words came from tenants who cannot vote in the election only proves how far removed from reality the board is. And has been.

The newsletter refers readers to a website that presents bogus and counterproductive information. There were no adopted design standards for the downtown. To scare potential businesses away by stating there was is foolish. Correct it!

Tiger Woods & Prince Charles. So different. So alike.

Readers may wonder why anyone would link Tiger Woods and England's Prince Charles.

While that pair is very much different in looks - Charles is one of the homeliest men on the planet - and one has had to work for everything he has while the other has had everything he has handed to him, there are both similarities and stark differences between Tiger and Charles.

First, they both like to play a sport that involves striking a ball with a stick. One is astride a horse while the other walks his course. One is very good at his sport and the other is Prince Charles.

But what struck this writer about a remarkable similarity was that both chose a beautiful woman to marry and be mother to their children but didn't seem to really want them as a traditional wife.

Prince Charles' marriage to Diana Spencer, herself a daughter of privilege, was shocking. He was much older and she was attractive. She quickly bore him two heirs and, according to her own remembrance, theirs was a loveless marriage.

Charles had known Diana for years and considered her nothing more than a friend - a younger woman who was a playmate of his young brothers. One can only imagine what his attraction, other than possibly one day being King of England, led Diana to agree to marrying the guy.

Men (and women) have attractions that

bring members of the opposite sex like moths to a light so the remote possibility of becoming King of England would likely be high on the list of almost every single Anglican woman in England.

Tiger Woods seemingly had everything going for him. A personable man of mixed heritage, his talent far outshone all others in his profession. It was apparent that he would attract many women but one might think that would end when he married Elin (Ee Ion) Nordegren in late 2004. Four and a third years later, she had borne two children with Tiger Woods.

Stories have emerged now that Tiger was unfaithful to his beautiful blonde Swedish wife within months of their marriage, then repeatedly so in the ensuing years.

Why would these two, Prince Charles and Tiger Woods, cheat on beautiful wives? Particularly so soon after each married? Charles cheated with an equally unattractive woman he obviously cared more for than his attractive your wife and Tiger with a bevy of party girls and tramps who knew he was married and still made themselves available to him. Ah, America!

The number of mistresses attributed to Tiger Woods at this writing is seven and the liaisons began shortly after he married the beautiful model. Once she signs her new "pre-nup" with the cad, look for her to return to her native Sweden with their sons. Good for her. Tiger will win millions more in prize money and be universally despised. Right for him.

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