

Citizens of Southport,...From Pat Dane

It has not been long since the elections sending Mayor Holden back to office for two more years with his promise of protecting the Southport Marina. The campaign was long and confrontational; I have been closely involved with the "Save the Marina" effort and was humbled by the support of the Southport voters that knew the truth.

In October 2005, the City of Southport requested the State Ports Authority to delay any re-negotiations on the lease until a decision was made on the Southport position to return the Marina to Southport. Senator RC Soles and Representative Bonner Stiller supported this condition and we all thought the State Ports Authority agreed. Subsequently in December 2005, the City of Southport made a proposal to buy the Marina and continued to request that no action be initiated by the State Ports Authority to change or modify the current lease.

Unexpectedly, the Southport Aldermen's Marina Committee, which includes the Save the Marina members, met with the NC State Ports Authority December 28th at 3 PM in Wilmington to be told that the State Ports Authority planned to modify the current lease agreement for Southport Marina, Inc. (Nick Garrett, Bubba Rawls & Tim Smith) and award two 10 year extensions to the leaseholders to manage and operate the Southport Marina. The new lease group assumes management and operation of the Marina effective January 2006. This vote took place despite the objections of the Save the Marina Committee Members and several Aldermen attending the meeting.

The current lease is effective until June 30, 2015 with a five (5) year extension available if the lease holder wants it. (No negotiation required.) That brings the lease to June 30, 2020 and with two (2) ten (10) year extensions, that brings the lease to June 30, 2040.

Where is our Mayor on this issue? He is exactly in the same place as he was when the sale was announced last July when he stated "It's a done deal". Now he says "There is nothing to be done, we must move on". Mr. Mayor there is much to be done if you are on the people's side and not partnered with Governor Easley! This entire charade is corrupt and a disgrace to anyone who examines the facts.

The offer from the City of Southport is reported to be double that of the projected revenue to the State over the 30 years of accumulated lease extensions. The new lease owners have not spent one day in ownership or lease management at the time of this voted extension package. The new lease holders claim to be prepared to spend over 2 million dollars by 2008; so did the last lease holder...it never happened. We know who will pay the capitol improvement tab...the boat owners will be paying the bill; it has already begun with increases in slip rental.

It appears that the leader of our City will not confront the destiny of our Marina. The Mayor will remain loyal to the political machine and contributors that have taken over Southport. They now own our Marina, vacant land, and our political system provides them zoning accommodations and gives away our most treasured assets. Be sure that in the not so distant future we will hear the announcement that our Marina has been sold to the Garrett Group. And our Alderman's enlightened passage of zoning restrictions in the Marina does not have any effect with regard to private ownership.

We the Citizens of Southport and North Carolina must take some action when confronted with such disregard for the common good, pork barrel politics at its worst, a Mayor that won't lead for his citizen's benefit or rights?

This is a sad day for Southport