

Letter To The Editor: Reader Says Mayoral Race Critical To Town

The race for mayor of Edenton this year is critical. The past year has seen major opportunities for efficiency in government mishandled. Needed revisions of the Charter are still unrealized. And the current mayor has expressed the view that the public trust of elected office is his personal possession. Efficiency in government is critical because no one has unlimited money.

Revision of the Charter is important to pinpoint accountability in government. Attitudes of the presiding officer help or hinder tremendously the agenda before us.

Consider the following. On June 12, 1979, Councilman Burroughs urged the Town Council to explore consolidation of services between city and county and the possible merger of governmental units. His remarks of 20 minutes indicated considerable forethought on the subject.

In the ensuring discussion, two councilmen were for the proposal, two said it would never pass in their lifetime, and two said nothing.

Mayor Harrell said he was against the merger idea.

Then Mayor Harrell said he was for an exploration of the subject by an unbiased committee. ("Unbiased" is the Mayor's precise word)

The two councilmen who said nothing were appointed to the select committee.

Then the mayor appointed himself chairman of the select committee!

There is an obvious contradiction here.

How can a new idea be fairly and thoroughly explored when (a) the chairman of the committee is openly against the idea...and...(b) the most knowledgeable councilman

on the subject is excluded from the committee!

At the next monthly Council meeting, a member of the audience asked the Mayor if the select committee had met during the past four weeks. While as a jar of mayonnaise, Mayor Harrell answered, "No."

Finally a month or two later a small paragraph appeared in The Herald that a committee from Council and Commissioners had met, explored the issue and all were satisfied with "things as they are". And because no consolidation of city and county government had ever passed in North Carolina (according to the Institute of Government) the committee apparently concluded that nothing more was to be done.

This episode is disturbing in many ways.

Economy in government is one of the most pressing issues today.

The Institute of Urban Affairs at UNC-Charlotte has an excellent volume evaluating different merger referendums over the past 30 years—Charlotte-Mecklenburg vote in '71, Nansmond-Suffolk mergers, the vote in Miami and Dare County, Florida, etc. Yet these material and opportunities for correspondence with mayors, commissioners, managers, etc., in all these situations were never explored. Did the "unbiased select" committee think it had nothing to learn from those outside North Carolina?

I know these materials exist because I have seen them. And as a resident of the smallest county in North Carolina, I wonder how much longer we can afford two governments? When will we do our own research, or put together our own

requests to the General Assembly for enabling legislation to minimize the cost of government?

Consider: Do we need a town treasurer and a county treasurer? a city tax office and a county tax office? a city manager and a county manager?

What services should be paid for by the entire county and which by the taxing district which uses them? And how much longer should citizens of Edenton pay double taxes?

And in related matter, what are the pros and cons of Arrowhead Beach or Chowan Beach communities or the Cape Colony-Country Club Drive area being incorporated into municipalities?

These are just a few items the select committee might have looked into thoroughly. Judging from the way the committee was constructed, the issues were not

examined very much. In effect the Burroughs proposal was whitewashed.

And now the chairman of that select committee wants to be re-elected mayor.

Now is the time for change.

If the recent past has been mismanaged, what is the outlook for the near future?

The Charter of the Town of Edenton has been amended over the years. The net result is ambiguity and too much room for misunderstanding. Now is the time to review the Charter as a whole so we may secure effective and economical government.

At least three issues are involved here.

First uncertainties as to "who controls" need to be eliminated. Lengthy conflicts of personalities and/or philosophies only sidetrack us from more important issues.

No one should have more

than one boss. But if the city manager receives one order from the mayor and another from council, who should he obey? And the same can happen to department heads and others. Thus the respective roles of council and mayor must be clarified.

Second, the mayor has vetoed the expenditure of funds authorized by the council. Past mayors never read this veto power into the Charter. They voted only in case of a tie vote. So to veto a council appropriation is to vote without authority. i.e. act as a dictator, because no tie vote exists.

This possibility for the future must be eliminated. There are other ways to redirect unwise council actions.

Third, a revised charter will eliminate the office of treasurer. A recent law from the General Assembly provided a better means of

handling a town's financial affairs. Now we waste \$300 per year for a few signatures when all the work is done by others. So let's eliminate the office of treasurer from the Charter and save ourselves some money.

The above item from our "near future" agenda is cited at length because attitudes will be so critical in meeting the revision challenge constructively.

Unfortunately the current mayor's attitude is not as healthy as it might be.

Election to office is a public trust from all the people.

When any mayor speaks continually of "my council" instead of our council, of "my zoning board" instead of the community's zoning board, of "my housing authority" instead of the people's housing authority, he has done more than slip a tongue.

Any mayor who speaks continually of "my people" inescapably excludes other people. And by excluding others, he betrays and degrades the office of mayor of Edenton.

Such language is the language of political divisiveness, friction and fear. It is not the language of unity and constructive politics.

For Edenton and Chowan County to prosper, our mayor must be at ease with all the people, not just "my people".

The mayor we need must be able to inspire and unify the present council or any council the people may elect. Together the council and mayor can bring out the best in all of us.

The upcoming discussions on the Charter may try the best of councils for different opinions will be vigorously expressed. That is as it should be.

The challenge is to constructively redefine the office of mayor and councilman for the next generation. That task will be most difficult if not impossible if the presiding officer continues to speak possessively and divisively of "my treasurer" or "my authority as mayor" or "my orders" to the city manager. His recent and inadequate handling of the Burroughs proposal suggests the charter issue may be mishandled, too.

Therefore the need is clear.

The need is for a mayor who fears no issue.

The need is for a mayor who will listen to all of us—to you and to you and to you. He cannot follow everyone's advice but he can convince that he respects differences.

We need a mayor who does not fear the future nor is content with the present.

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ELECT J. D. Elliott MAYOR NOVEMBER 6

J. D. Elliott
112 West Gale St.

I want to be your mayor!
Last week in this space I shared with you a few of my beliefs and concerns about the office I seek in the November 6th Municipal Election, as well as the problems we face.
In this letter, I would like to zero in on one concern we all share; one which, as your mayor, I will give a top priority. It is economy in government. Economy in government is a way of beating inflation by addressing the problem at the source, saving money at the end. In other words, I think we should develop a closer working relationship between the Town of Edenton and Chowan County. Citizens of Edenton are also residents of Chowan County. Therefore, when a dollar is saved at the county level it saves two dollars for the taxpayers of Edenton. As we face a state mandated property tax revaluation in 1982 it is important that we seek now a form of government which produces economy.
I think there is something which can be done to not just hold the line but to gain on inflation by methods not yet tried in Edenton and Chowan County. The present mayor was directed by the council to investigate the possibilities of economy in government. As the self-appointed committee chairman, to my knowledge, he has not addressed the question. In my opinion this is an issue too important to discard.
I have the time, energy and leadership ability to see that the council's wishes are carried out. Elect me Mayor of Edenton on November 6th and I pledge to you my best efforts to be worthy of your confidence.

J. D. Elliott
J. D. Elliott
Candidate for Mayor

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