

A PAPER TOWN: "I THINK NOT!"

As Mayor of the Town of Arcadia Lakes, I would like to clear up some of the flagrant reporting errors in your Associate Editor's article of September 14, 2011 "A tale of two anti-cities." My wife and I have lived and reared a family in The Town of Arcadia Lakes for the past 30 years. I have served on Town Council fifteen (15) of those years. I have had the pleasure to serve as Mayor the past eight (8) years.

There are approximately 350 cities and towns in the Great State of SC. One Hundred (100) of these towns and cities have 1000 citizens or less. Arcadia in the last count has 847 citizens which ranks in the top ten of these 100. To name a few familiar great towns with fewer residents, I give you Cameron, Eastover, Edisto Island, Gilbert, Harleyville, Santee and Norway.

Contrary to your Associate Editors article, we do provide services to our citizens. We have always **prided** ourselves in holding down our town's "cost of doing business" by providing the majority of our services through intergovernmental agreements with Richland County, SCDOT, The City of Columbia, East Richland County Public Service District and the Municipal Association of SC to name a few. Contrary to your Associate Editor's misinformed opinion, we pay County taxes and additional mileage for services through intergovernmental agreements. Richland County Sheriff's department supplies us security. We supply an office for our assigned CAT Team deputy(at no charge to the County) in our town hall on N. Trenholm Rd. Richland County Engineering and Operations maintains our roads and drainage and EPA – NPDES (testing and reporting) through tax millage added to our property taxes. We individually contract and pay for our water through The City of Columbia and buy our sewer service through East Richland County Public service District. SCDOT maintains the state roads that pass through our town. Garbage service is supplied and paid for individually through Yandle Garbage Service and a franchise agreement set up between Yandle and our town. By working with these well established entities, we negate the costs for duplication of work performed. Many sister towns and cities could also benefit from combining services. This minimizes our costs of operation. Our budget, contrary to that reported by Councilman Bishop is over \$250,000 per year (not \$110,000 per year as reported.) Less than 10% of our budget dollars comes from State revenue sharing which all cities and towns in SC are privy. Contrary to your Associate Editor's Report, we do not receive Federal Funds. The majority of our budget (over 50%) comes from business licenses, permits and franchise fees.

Contrary to Mr. Bishop's report, he was asked to put together a "Vision" committee in order to update our Comprehensive Plan required by state law that was first published in 1999, eight years before Mr Bishop was elected to council. Also, Mr. Bishop, contrary to your article, was no sanctioned by council to approach anyone about annexation. He took it upon himself and on his own to approach Forest Acres about same.

The current plan Council has adopted and contracted a third party to put together for us includes meetings with town officials and citizen groups over the next 12 months and research the pro and cons of three(3) or more options....not two (2) as reported. These options would include but are not limited to :

1. Operate the town as we currently do with the same services.
2. Add services with associated costs
3. Merge with another municipality

The research with costs, pro and cons, etc is scheduled to be available for a referendum vote with the November 2012 National elections. The decision as to where we go in the future will not be decided by a single councilman, the full council or uninformed newspaper articles. The decision will be determined in a vote by the citizens of Arcadia Lakes after they are informed and educated to the many possible options available..

Last, but not least, we are all living in hard economic times in our towns, cities, states and country. Our town has positioned itself through many years of very frugal budget spending with a very good balance sheet and reserves. These reserves, in the past, when interest rates were high served to help pay for services such as garbage pick-up. With the current economic downturn and lower interest rates, we have the surplus to fill in the short falls that may come in State revenue sharing, business licenses and franchise fee. These funds will also be put to work, through our 12 month study, to meet the future wishes of our citizens. These are our citizen's dollars and will be managed frugally, if I have any say so in the matter.

We live in a great town with great folks . We encourage anyone looking for a close nit, friendly palce to live to contact out town hall and visitor's center at 6911-2 North Trenholm Rd.

Sincerely,

Richard Thomas

Mayor