

## Why the Rush?

Why is Supervisor Grace in such a rush to get his highway garage/Depot Square project off the ground?

Why does Supervisor Grace think that three elected councilmen should simply follow his lead?

Why is Supervisor Grace denying taxpayers the opportunity to comment on his plan — which involves his spending our tax dollars?

The August 6 Town Board meeting, held outdoors at the Brian Slavin Aquatic Facility (aka Shrub Oak Pool) was remarkable. Remarkable for the Supervisor's arrogance when dealing with his fellow Board members and his disregard for the public he was elected to serve.

**For starters:** Supervisor Grace unilaterally rearranged the meeting agenda so that public hearings, always held at the beginning of the meeting, were moved to the end of the agenda — and the presentation on his pet Depot Square project, which lasted about 50 minutes — was at the beginning. The Supervisor's presentation got the audience and, more importantly, the daylight. By the time the public hearings started, people had left and the camera was left with limited artificial light lighting.

Given that four public hearings were already scheduled, and there's usually only about 1½ hours of daylight for an outdoor meeting, why couldn't the Supervisor have waited to make his presentation until September 3?

**Next:** Supervisor Grace asked his fellow Board members to act on his plan that night, despite the fact that he only unveiled a major component of his plan, the sludge composting operation, to the Board for the first time that night. What ever happened to work session discussions? What ever happened to giving Board members critical information, like cost analyses, to review BEFORE they're asked to vote on something?

**Next:** Supervisor Grace continued to minimize the possibility that the highway garage site would be contaminated. Initially, he said it wasn't likely there would be any significant contamination because the site had never been used for manufacturing. But Tuesday, after portions of the Phase I Environmental Study that documented that the site had been used for manufacturing were posted online, he changed his message. On Tuesday, he said it wasn't likely that the actual building site would be contaminated and that the contamination might be possibly further down the street where the parking would be and where less digging would be needed.

And, Supervisor Grace added a new wrinkle: he talked about getting brownfield grants to cleanup any contamination. But it wasn't clear from his presentation whether the town or the developer would apply for the grants — or who would pay for the cleanup if there wasn't any grant.

**Next:** Initially, Supervisor Grace stated that the highway garage site was worth at least \$2.3 million. At Tuesday's meeting, he said the site had "real value." What happened to the \$2.3 million? How did he come up with that number?

**Next:** Supervisor Grace announced that the town would save the developer "soft costs" by having the town get all the necessary approvals for the new Depot Square building. Since when does the town do a private developer's job?

**Next:** By rearranging the agenda so that he could use the daylight for the presentation of his pet project, Supervisor Grace pushed Courtesy of the Floor to the very end of the agenda, when only those who braved the cool night air and mosquitos were still around. By 9:30pm, those who came to the meeting to ask questions about Depot Square had already left.

And, when Councilmen Bianco, Patel and Paganelli made it clear that they weren't ready to vote for his requests to advertise for Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to move his project forward, Supervisor Grace said he'd ask for a vote at next week's work session — when typically there's no opportunity for the public to speak.

**Which leads to the question: what is likely to happen at the August 13 work session?**

1. The “no public comment” at work sessions isn't a hard and fast rule. It's up to the Board, not the supervisor, to permit the public to speak at the meeting. All it takes is three votes.
2. Supervisor Grace may continue to argue that voting to advertise the (RFPs) doesn't cost the town anything (what about the cost of the staff time to prepare the RFP?) or commit the town to anything. But why should a councilman vote for an RFP if he isn't sure he actually wants to proceed with the project?
3. The Board could decide to wait until more information is available before beginning the RFP process. In addition to the questions I raised in an earlier blog, Tuesday's meeting generated a list of new questions that need answers before proceeding with any RFP. As Councilman Paganelli said, let's not put the cart before the horse.

And we're still waiting for Supervisor Grace to explain: Why the rush?