



Cape Fear Firebird

The Light of Save the Cape

September 17, 2015

Laws, like sausages, cease to inspire respect in proportion as we know how they are made.
~ John Godfrey Saxe (American poet)

Other People's Money

The fiscal 2016 budget for North Carolina emerged from the murk of the legislative process on Tuesday, scarcely two and a half months late. It is the work product of a joint committee of the State Senate and House of Representatives, conducted behind closed doors in a process well-concealed from you and us. But not, of course, from insiders, lobbyists, and other people of influence.

Although there are some good things in this 429-page sausage, they are only good in that they are not as bad as we feared. But here are some that really bad, appalling, shocking:

The Rocks. During the regular session, Senator Michael Lee proposed a bill to remove The Rocks, the barrier put in the Cape Fear River by the Corps of Engineers 140 years ago to close an inlet from the ocean. When his plan appeared, all the municipalities in the lower Cape Fear adopted resolutions of opposition. Bald Head feared loss of beaches; Southport would be at risk for storm surges.

The bill went nowhere. But Senator Lee, former Chairman of the State Ports Authority doesn't seem to care what people think or want. He attached his language to the budget bill although it had nothing to do with the budget, a tactic to have it carried along without due deliberation. The House did catch it and soften the language, but a State commitment to the project is still apparent.

What's that all about anyway? The General Assembly disassembles with this reason: "to reestablish the natural hydrodynamic flow between the Cape Fear River and the Atlantic Ocean." Phooey. It's all about the ports. Senator Lee has admitted it's to give the Port of Wilmington a shorter route to the ocean. We fear this would open an even shorter route to the site above Southport where the State Ports Authority had planned a megaport. And might still. We addressed this in our newsletters since April 30. Go to: http://savethecape.org/stcwp1/?page_id=64.

The Ports Subsidy. The Ports Authority has another friend in high places, Senator Bill Rabon. He has gotten into the budget \$35 million for the ports. Every year. And what are they going to do with that? There are no strings, just a pile of money equal to the Ports annual revenues.

The Ports Authority's strategic plan speaks of new, larger cranes and equipping the Port of Wilmington to handle much larger ships, ships that cannot now get to the port. So as we write this, the Ports Authority is developing a plan to dredge the Cape Fear River five feet deeper. A \$700 million project that the Corps of Engineers declined to consider. A futile, hubris-driven scheme with taxpayers' money. The State's commerce would not benefit. So who would?

This is not money the Ports Authority earned being wasted. It's ours.