



Cape Fear Firebird

The Light of Save the Cape

October 9, 2012

Light is the only thing that can sweeten our political atmosphere—light thrown upon every detail of administration in every department—light diffused through every passage of policy—... .
Woodrow Wilson (*The Overland Monthly*, 1884)

Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants, electric light the best policeman.
—Louis Brandeis (*Harpers Weekly*, 1913)

Only when the doors of government are open wide, and the sun truly shines in, can we be sure that our government by the people is working for the people.
—Governor Beverly Perdue (press release, July 8, 2009)

Behind Closed Doors

One of the many burdens of public service is accountability to the public being served. A difficult constituent is the public—expecting honest, forthright administration in the best interests of the people. And North Carolina’s laws on public records and public meetings make it especially difficult for public officials to serve the special interests which are so much more supportive.

We knock on bureaucracy’s doors often. In our newsletter of April 2011 we reported:

But the State Ports Authority seems to regard the Governor’s mandates on accountability and transparency as optional. Likewise, State laws on Public Records and Meetings of Public Bodies. Prior to the meetings of the Board of Directors, the directors and staff have a nice dinner together, at which a quorum is present. But we are not invited. At the formal meeting, the directors are supplied a book of materials. The public is supplied a different book, much thinner. Many meetings are held by telephone conference; perfunctory, not a forum for deliberation. Contempt for the public or simply contemptible?

Since then, the State Ports Authority has been transferred to a new cabinet department and the Executive Director has been replaced. And now, the doors have been shut even tighter.

The final conclusions of the Maritime Strategy Study and the State’s logistics plan are now being formed by a Logistics Strategy Planning Committee, which includes members of the State Board of Transportation and the Boards of Directors of the State Ports Authority and the Global Transpark. The meetings are closed. When Save the Cape sought to attend, Tom Bradshaw, the new Executive Director of the State Ports Authority, rudely told us to go away. We have been told by the NCDOT coordinator of the process that minutes are not kept. And the NCDOT General Counsel first told us she did not see a reason why we should not be admitted, but after consultation with parties unknown, she told us the group was not a “public body” and we could be excluded. And we were. And are. Just what are they planning, anyway?