

FDOT, Our Boulevards, and the Shamefaced Daily Paper

Last January 2017, The Citizen surprised me by editorializing that FDOT should keep its hands off of South Roosevelt Boulevard. FDOT and local hard-core bicycling enthusiasts wanted to cut the four lanes down to two and add bike lanes. I wrote a Letter to the Editor, approvingly:

Thank you for your accurate Sunday editorial critical of FDOT's actions in Key West. To take a trip down memory lane, here are the errors and abuses already visited on us in the N. Roosevelt project:

1. They did not offer the usual incentive for early completion, resulting in an 860-day project.
2. The award was suspiciously close, the equivalent of winning with a bid of \$3,999 vs your competitor's \$4,000.
3. For the losing bidder, it would have been their pre-eminent project. For the winner, it was not even in their current top 12 on their website.
4. The lackadaisical work was so embarrassing that they put up the even more embarrassing green curtain to hide their sloth. The silly reason was that it was safer, to prevent bike handlebars getting stuck in the cyclone, but the only injury was when it blew free and knocked a biker over.
5. Instead of renting machinery parking space, they used the road, blocking lanes otherwise able to be used. Worst was blocking the Salt Run bridge, making bikers cross Roosevelt twice unnecessarily
6. The sharrows were unneeded and induce dangerous riding. Fortunately, they are being generally ignored. Only a single biker out of a hundred uses the road, on average, by my count.
7. They placed the main lights entering the city towards Flagler where you couldn't see them until you were already at the intersection. After a couple of years, hurray, they moved them to where they belong.
8. The ridiculous crosswalks. Nobody wanted them. Dangerous. Enough has been said.
9. Odd silliness like having four lights for three lanes heading out of town. One never sees this nonsense anywhere else.
10. More silliness: for a mile between Kennedy and Beachside, 12 signs and pavement arrows merrily urge you to turn into the Seaplane Basin.
11. Worst was again not following their own guidelines, never to one-way a road with businesses on it. In the two years before a number of us got the FDOT boss to change it back to two-way, at least a million dollars was lost by businesses on the Boulevard, some of which went bankrupt.
12. The signs, oh the signs. I just counted 236 between the Y and Eisenhower. I think this is down from the 252 Cynthia and I counted two years ago. I counted 14 filled-in holes that might have been where signposts were. Maybe this is what Ms Panico got out of her plea to FDOT for sign relief.

The last is important for the planned South Roosevelt boondoggle. If they are placed at the same rate as on N. Roosevelt, we will have 18 sharrows signs in each direction, and nine signs each way for the crosswalks. It is really only the 27 signs on the Atlantic side that bother me. Do you note how distracting the handicapped spot signs are for the three spaces I have never seen a car use, all of which include the \$200 fine sign? Well, multiply that distraction times nine. Noplace else in the world desecrates sacred views like that of our Atlantic Ocean. Say goodbye to our currently beautiful view.

We don't need any of that. We need the drainage part corrected, that's all. Except for that, and I hope they get it right this time, we will be inconvenienced for—how long this time? Did they put the rapid completion factor for this project?—only to end up with something worse than what we have already.

As The Citizen concluded, the FDOTs cause us to lose respect for government in general. That's where the Tea party, Alt-Right, and our current administration come from. Again, thanks to The

Citizen for your insight, and, I pray, influence.

Sincerely,

Rick Boettger

Okay, that's the first part of the story, my investigative opinionating (a new journalistic category) about FDOT and our Boulevards. The second half is The Citizen's reaction to my submission. It relates to my slamming of Keys media a few weeks ago for their betrayal of the First Amendment in favor of kissing the asses of the rich and powerful.

I submitted what I knew was too long a Letter to the Editor with the following plea:

Dear Editor:

Below and attached is a draft commentary on FDOT. It is currently double your Letter guidelines. It would torture my soul to get it down to 350, a limit I have been religiously honoring.

I am humbly beseeching you to make a one-time exception to the word limit. I promise never to ask again (I am getting old, so "never" promises are becoming easier to make).

Or, could it possibly be a guest editorial? I have some standing, having in fact been the Secretary of the Coalition of North Roosevelt Businesses back in the one-way war. I had a bi-weekly column in The Citizen in 2009, but never a guest editorial.

Please advise.

The Editor, Kay Harris , responded the next day:

Richard, I am sorry but the guidelines are very strict. We don't publish guest columns and our letters limit is 350. If you can get it under 400, I can print it. Thank you for understanding, Kay

Okay, I cut it down and resubmitted with the following note:

I hate following rules, Kay, but appreciate how you fairly serve the community with your well-read letters to the editor section, so I bow to your will. It really was no harder than the choice Sophie had to make. 398 below and attached.

I had every expectation of having it published, and was surprised when after a few weeks it was not. So I sent her polite query:

Dear Kay,

My goodness, how the time flies. I'm pretty sure this is not in the queue. Did you get the shortened version? But the previous editor once intended to publish, and it just got lost in the stack, and he just

needed a reminder.

If you chose not to publish, I am curious, of course. But I am very appreciative of having had everything I've sent to the Citizen published until now, as well as the opportunity to write columns two different times. So whatever the reason, it is purely your business and discretion. I only write what I want to write about. You get to publish exactly what you want to publish. My glass with you has been filled near to the brim, and I thank you for past favor, whatever the decision on this one.

Regards,
Rick

I never heard anything, I tried sending it to the other email address. Nothing.

My, my. How things have changed. Among the letters of mine they printed in the past was a crucial one right before the election of Morgan McPherson, critical of Jimmy Weekley's support of big development. This was back when The Citizen did endorsements, and they went all in for Weekley. They put my pro-Morgan argument in their Sunday edition right before the Tuesday election. When Morgan won by 27 votes, I was one of maybe a dozen people who could claim to have gotten him that last 27, and maybe the only non-Conch outsider.

And really, they have published absolutely everything I have submitted since then, which is not to be expected—the estimable Roger Kostmayer had a very civil piece rejected over his strong displeasure a few months ago.

But at least they responded to his queries. Now, it seems I am suffering from what I described here last month as the Keys' media Blue Paper Derangement Syndrome. I posited that they are so jealous and intimidated by our actual investigative journalism, using the First Amendment, researching the facts, speaking truth to power, and afflicting the comfortable while comforting the afflicted (whereas they afflict the afflicted and comfort the comfortable) that they, ostrich-like, try to pretend that we do not exist.

So they have made me a non-person. I further expect that even my agreeing with their editorial position gave them twinges of guilt. During the litany of horrors described above re: North Roosevelt, they had been their usual lapdog cheerleaders of everything FDOT was doing. My own writings, and involvement with the group that got the one-way changed back to two-way, lets me be right while they timidly served the purposes of the Powers That Be—in FDOT's construction office in the Boog Powell parking lot, the project manager's office was gaily festooned with The Citizen's fawning coverage, with not of a word of my ultimately accurate and scathing criticisms of their hare-brained decisions.

So there it is. As I said, I don't know how they sleep well at night. I know I sure do, spooned with my wee Cynthia.