

EX ALDERMAN NEWSLETTER 61

August 30, 2012

By John Hoffmann

RAY VINSON...WELCOME TO SNOBURBIA...Vinson Mortgage screwed again on sign deal: For the second time in a year Ray Vinson, the mortgage lender to the Average Joe got a taste of Town and Country politics.

Last December Vinson got a real warm welcome to Town and Country. Vinson was moving his mortgage business to an office building just inside the southern city limits along Des Peres Road. Vinson who advertises extensively on television was not only filling a mostly unoccupied office building, buying a business license and bring jobs to Town and Country, he was also having people from North County and St. Charles drive here to close on mortgages.

His request for a 42-inch sign on the front of his building was turned down. Mortgage broker and alder-idiot Steve Fons refused to recuse himself and voted against a competitor. The two Ward-1 alderwomen were for it, two-face Tim Welby and Democrat Al Gerber in Ward-2 were against it, Fons and Fred Meyland-Smith from Ward-3 voted against, while both Ward-4 Aldermen voted for the sign.

It was a tie, a Mr. Republican, Mayor/Cigarette Lobbyist Jon "Snidely" Dalton had to break the tie. Dalton voted against the independent, self starter Vinson.

Now Vinson was back, wanting a second sign.

Non-Rich People Need to find his Town and Country office: Vinson wanted a second sign on the north side of the building that traffic going south on I-270 could see.

"Most of our customers come from north and west," explained Vinson as to why it was important that motorists on southbound I-270 see his sign.

Vinson claimed the sign was for safety reasons, so his customers would not drive across three lanes of traffic trying to exit to Manchester Road.

The thought of so many people from North St. Louis County and St. Charles coming to Town and Country surely sent shivers up the backs of some alderpersons.

Alderman Tim Welby wondered in the work session how those few Vinson Mortgage customers coming from South County or Jefferson County up northbound I-270 could ever find the place without a sign before the Manchester Road exit. Apparently mortgagees from South County and Jefferson County are better at understanding directions than those from North County and St. Charles.



Mortgage banker and TV pitchman Ray Vinson and Christine Mudd of Warren Sign address the board in the public hearing hoping to get a second sign.

The exception to the rule: It was mentioned that the only other variance request similar to Vinson's to pass for one for BJC, where Missouri Baptist Hospital got oversized signs on two sides of a building. But of course Ray Vinson is not Missouri Baptist. That variance was given just a few months ago.



During the work session Planning Director Sharon Rothmel tells the board all the ways the new sign request violates the city code, causing Vinson Mortgage to ask for a variance. Rothmel claims to having been working on a new sign code for the last 3-years.



Christine Mudd of Warren Sign representing Vinson Mortgage takes a question during the work session.

The Vote: Jon Benigas announced he was against the variance for the sign until the city looked at redoing the sign codes. This is something that Planning Director Sharon Rothmel has claimed has been underway for years.

“They want 100% increase in size and two signs on the building instead of one,” said Benigas.

Meyland-Smith said he was with Benigas. A motion was made to continue the matter. The continuance passed 7-1 with only Chuck Lenz voting against it.

Lenz has said in the past that he would only vote against a sign variance if sign was more out of proportion than the Ginger Bay spa sign at Town and Country Crossing that was allowed last October before Lenz was elected to the Board of Aldermen.

Both Ward-1 alderpersons Skip Mange and Lynn Wright were not ready to give Mr. Vinson a sign variance and voted for a continuance.

NEWCOMER TAKE NOTE: Immediately prior to the Vinson sign variance, an accounting company on Woodlake Drive at the South Forty Service Road and South Woods Mill received a sign variance for an oversized sign on an 8-0 vote. Fred Meyland-Smith went out of his way to mention how the applicant was a long time Town and country business. It almost seemed like a jab at the high-pitched voice Vinson, who has been in town less than a year.

ROADS AND STORMWATER CRISIS:

Trickle versus A Lot: Mayor/Cigarette Lobbyist/Property Snatcher From Widows Jon “Snidely” Dalton began the work session by saying, “we have received a steady trickle of comments over street conditions and storm water issues.”

Tim Welby followed Dalton and said, “We have heard a lot from residents who are unhappy about the streets.”

This begs the question, what is it...a “trickle” or “a lot.”



Mayor Dalton and the two aldermen from Ward-4 apparently did not feel the love on July 31 at the Village on Conway annual subdivision meeting. The residents were unhappy about the condition their city maintained streets. The streets are full of cracks and patches.

Amazing: You can’t have a discussion about anything without Fred Meyland-Smith talking far more anyone else. Fred asked “how do we finance street repairs?” YIKES! I AM NOT KIDDING...someone who has been on the Board of Aldermen since 2005 and isn’t quite sure where the money comes from for street repairs.

Fred was told that the primary funding comes from the “Road Fund” that has its own budget. The money is part of County property taxes. The tax money is collected by the County and reimbursed to the city. The second method can be money from the general fund, normally funded by sales taxes and fees. The final possible roads funding source can be from the Capital Improvement Budget.

Simply put...since the recession in the fall of 2008 and the loss of the Wal Mart store, revenues are down. Since the last property reassessment the Road Fund is also down as property values dropped.

STORM WATER: Welby and Public Works Director and engineer Craig Wilde, explained how storm water projects are graded by independent engineering consultants and given a score as to the importance of each project. The most serious problems are addressed first regardless who the people are and where they live. A very fair way!



Public Works Director Craig Wilde talks storm water ...zzzz

THE DALTON WAY TO SLOW THINGS DOWN...A TASK FORCE: Dalton is apparently going to annual neighborhood meetings looking for love, hugs and kisses from residents and instead is getting complaints about the streets and storm water issues.

He announced he is going to form a TASK FORCE to look at the issue and will get civil engineers on the task force. This way Dalton can deflect heat from residents by saying he is on top of an issue. I smell reelection seven months away.

Phil Behnen chair of the Finance Commission and Welby of Public Works were named as the co-chairs.

Problem: I don't know where Dalton is going to find his civil engineers. The year I was the chair of the Public Works and Storm Water Commission, I tried to find civil engineers to serve and had zero luck. The commission has some smart businessmen, a land/facility manager and a doctor who is great with physics, but no engineers.

SKIP IS UPSET: Alderman Skip Mange reminded the mayor that the storm water projects are funded by the “Parks and Storm Water” sales tax and someone on the new Task Force should be from the Parks Commission.

Alderman Chuck Lenz corrected Mange and said it was the “Storm Water and Parks sales tax.” Lenz is 100% correct and once again former mayor Skip mange is wrong. The sales tax was on the ballot as the “Storm Water and Parks” sales tax.

Mange apparently has forgotten that for over five years almost all the money from the Storm Water and Parks sales tax went to paying off the purchase of parks. There was only one major storm water project during that time. Now that the park land purchases are paid off, it is time to spend money on overdue storm water projects.

SKIP IS IN A RUT OR HAS AN OBSESSION! We wrote in our last newsletter how Mange unveiled at the last Conservation and Historical Preservation Commission meeting, that he wanted to spend close to \$10,000,000 in buying a Frank Lloyd Wright designed house, fixing it and opening it to the public, buying 18 acres of land and a house on Conway Road for a fourth city park and buy a house another house on Conway Road, tear it down and recover a log cabin that the house was supposed to have been built around and then and move the cabin to Drace Park.

After reading this a former alderman who served back in the days when Skip as mayor was wasting money herding deer onto trucks and shipping them to rural Missouri where most died within days from internal organs shutting down due to stress, wrote me.

The alderman said that 12 years ago as mayor Mange wanted to buy the Frank Lloyd Wright house.



Mange, the big spender!

NO CITY PROPERTY TAX FOR 2013: The Board of Aldermen voted to continue the zero property tax rate the city currently has. The city can only raise the rate every other year and this is that year. In assessment years the cities cannot raise property tax rates more than 10% and since ours is zero it can't be raised.

The Finance Commission voted not to request that the rate be raised because the city started 2012 with a \$16,585,000 reserve. The commission believed that despite having deficit budgets, the city's cash reserve needs to be lowered before increasing any tax rates.

PRESCHOOL AND KINDERGARTEN FOR AMONTE SUBDIVISION WINS APPROVAL FROM PLANNING AND ZONING The chamber was full of unhappy residents who did not want the Raintree Community preschool to be built in the abandoned Amonte subdivision off of South Mason Road.

A vote for the project was continued at the July P&Z meeting and city attorney Steve Garrett was instructed to find out if the school met the definition as a "school" under zoning laws or if it was a commercial day care facility.

Garrett said the facility as promoted by the owner and president Ilya Eydelman was a school, since they had terms winter and spring breaks and qualified fulltime teachers like schools. Garrett said the State of Missouri defines an elementary school as grades 8 and under but doesn't give a starting grade, while primary schools are grades 9-to-12.

Since "schools" are allowed in residential zone areas there was no legal reason to keep Raintree from building a school on the 11 acres of land.

The majority of residents complained about the increase in traffic the school with 70 students (ages 2½-thru-6) and staff would generate.

One resident said, "I have never seen an educational facility like CBC or Whitfield that doesn't have impact on traffic."

Of course I don't think any of the students at Raintree Community School will be driving their own cars to class.

Another woman spoke and said she was afraid for the children's safety as the increased traffic congestion would result in more auto accidents possibly involving cars the children were passengers in. "We are endangering the children that have their parents drive them to school," she said.

One woman thought 75 cars coming and leaving the school over three hour periods in the morning and afternoon would create traffic chaos. "We are going to need the Town and Country Police for traffic control," she said.

Two independent traffic engineers, one for the school and one for the city, did reports on the increase of traffic and found that it would not have a major impact.

One woman said the subdivision with the collapsed street and storm water sewer would surely be developed soon now that the real estate market is coming back. It was pointed out to her the original plans for Amonte failed in 2006 at the height of the real estate market not in the fall of 2008 when the recession hit.

One couple who complained about the school in July spoke again. The husband said how they visited the Raintree School in Ballwin and were impressed, but “after many hours of consideration” they are against it.

“Fine architects could make this a premier location,” he said of the lots located on solid rock where half the lot is down the side of a cliff.

Last minute document: Steve Garrett also said just before the meeting someone handed him a copy of a state license that appeared to show Raintree at its current location in Ballwin has a Daycare license.

This should be no shock! A regular reader pointed this out to me last week and I looked it up. They currently have the same license as a Kindercare facility has. That was some research done by Mr. Garrett.

The proposal with 21 special restrictions passed on a 6-1 vote. If the city’s lawyer declared Raintree a school by city definition the P&Z Commission could not do anything but approve it after creating special conditions.

NO SHOW: Mayor/Cigarette Lobbyist/Widow’s Land Snatcher Jon “Snidely” Dalton is a member of the P&Z Commission. Once again he failed to show up for the meeting. This was no place where Dalton wanted to be...in a room full of angry voters where he should cast a vote they would not like. As mayor he has only had to vote to break a tie three times in eight years.

WHO NEEDS OUTLET MALLS? When we lived in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, DC we didn’t need no stink’in outlet malls. We had a Nordstrom Rack in Rockville. The second Nordstrom Rack is opening in West County in Manchester on September 13.

COMING TO CHESTERFILED VALLEY: Barron Glass on Manchester Road between 141 and Barrett Station Road has signs up announcing they are moving to the Valley.

ROCKWOOD STAYS AHEAD OF PARKWAY IN TEST SCORES:. The last time we looked at Missouri Assessment Program tests scores by school district the Rockwood District was sixth and Parkway was seventh or eighth. Lindbergh had soared to the top and has stayed there.

The 2012 scores are out. The scores list a score for communications arts (English, writing and reading) and Math scores.

http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/stl-info/map-scores-by-district/html_21b469ea-e5a3-11e1-b88b-0019bb30f31a.html?appSession=1369888265548

We took the two scores, added them together and divided by two. I used the final number to rank the school districts. Webster Groves which had been in the top five for years dropped significantly, while Brentwood improved noticeably since the last time we looked. Here are our rankings using the combined MAP scores:

- | | |
|-------------------|--------|
| 1) Lindbergh | 81.22 |
| 2) Ladue | 78.42 |
| 3) Kirkwood | 77.465 |
| 4) Brentwood | 75.505 |
| 5) Clayton | 75.225 |
| 6) Rockwood | 73.75 |
| 7) Parkway | 71.5 |
| 8) Webster Groves | 69.28 |

CARTOONS:

From Charlotte Peters Son, Mike Peters, who grew up in Webster Groves during the height of the Phyllis Diller experience in Webster Groves. Diller was a good friend of Stan Kann who was a regular on Charlotte's mid day variety show. Diller was responsible for getting Kann on the Tonight Show where he would show Johnny Carson his collection of antique vacuum cleaners with disastrous and funny results.

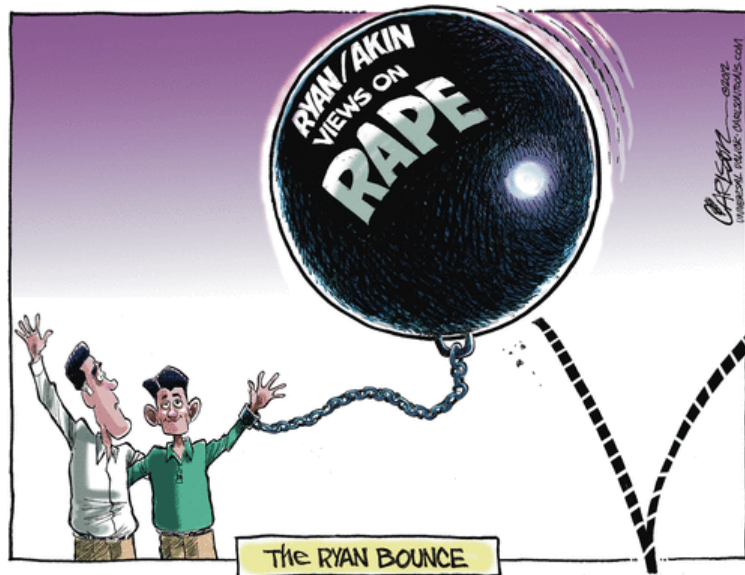
I remember that Diller shocked the Webster Park neighborhood when she painted the 3-story frame house on Mason Avenue, two doors behind the city Library pink to match her Thunderbird. I can remember one afternoon when with my mother at the Bettendorf-

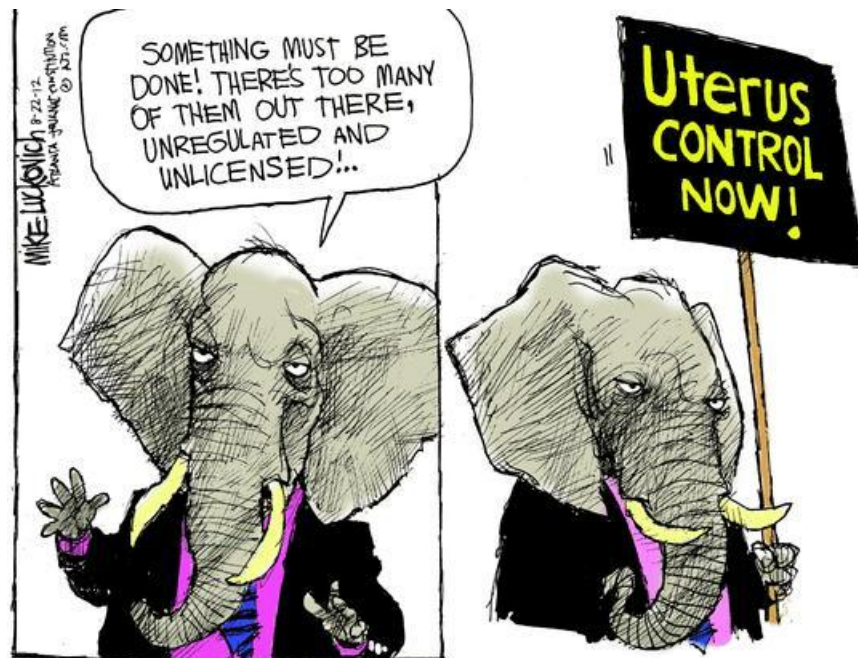
Rapp store at Elm and Big Bend. This was back in the early 1960s when you could smoke when, where and at anytime you wanted to. Phyllis was pushing a shopping cart, wearing a pink feather boa, smoking a cigarette at the end of a foot long cigarette holder.

Hurricane Isaac may have caused the Republicans to cancel the first day of their convention, but it was Hurricane Todd that made a direct hit on the GOP a week earlier. The editorial cartoons about Mr. Akin were abundant.



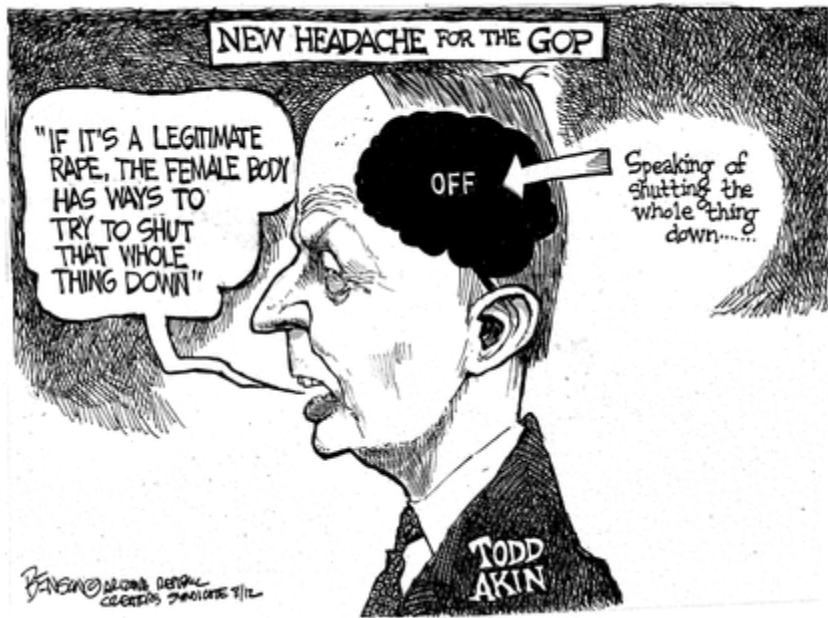


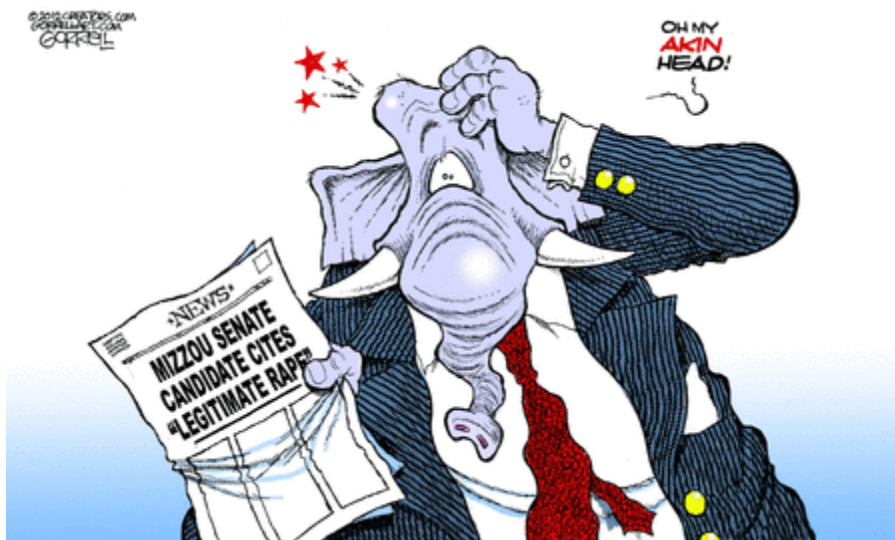
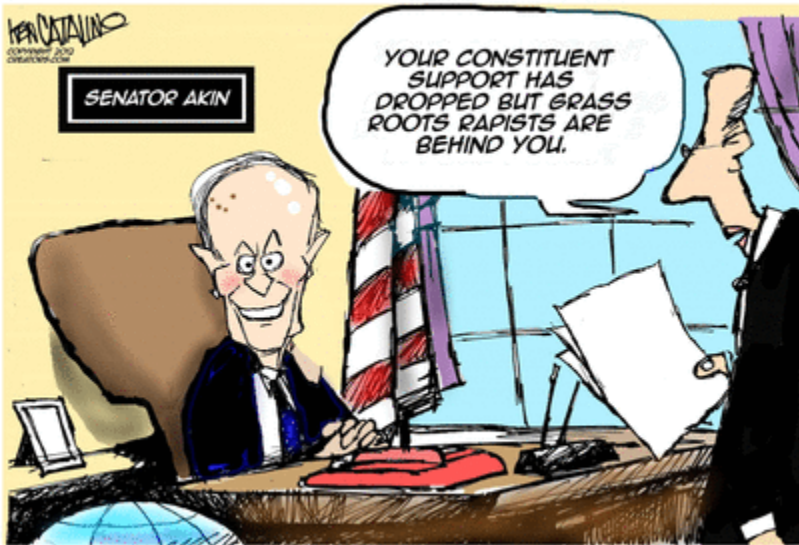






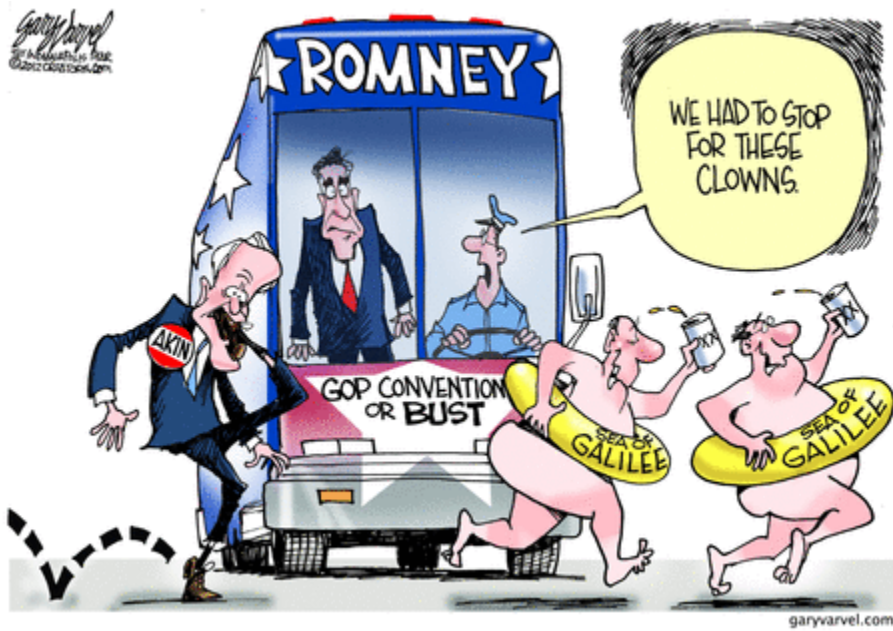
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VIOLENCE IN AMERICA



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