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STATE AND LOCAL POLITICS
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CITY OF CITIZENS

The beautiful seaside city of Gloucester, Massachusetts is a perfect example of how the interests of the local government can get out of touch with the needs of the citizenry.

Gloucester is a city of about thirty thousand year round residents, but also has a booming seasonal residency and yearly influx of tourists from around the globe. The city has some logistical problems that most cities are fortunate enough not to have to face. Part of the city, the main downtown locations and tourist attractions, are located on an island that is separated from the mainland by the majestic Annisquam river. The island also holds the majority of the population. On the opposite side of the river are two communities, Magnolia and West Gloucester, that can only be reached by crossing a bridge. Both communities are quite large in area and hold a medium size population as compared to the core population on the island. On the island there are also two distinct communities that are miles from the downtown hub. They are Annisquam Village and Lanesville.

The main logistical problem the city faces in providing services to these outlying and spacious individual communities is in the emergency services department. Gloucester is an old city, first founded in 1623, and historically there were small fire stations located in Magnolia, West Gloucester, Lanesville, and East Gloucester, with the main station located right in the center of downtown. Each substation had a response time of 2-3 minutes in the area it served, and the central station had comparable rates. The need for these sub-

- stations was always great as the distance from the main station of the communities they served was vast, and in the summer months when tourism and traffic were at their apex it could take 12-15 minutes to get emergency services out there. Now in Magnolia, and West Gloucester this was further complicated by the fact that the only way to cross the Annisquam river was by one of two bridges. The bridge closest to the communities was a small two lane drawbridge, The Bylnman Bridge, and in the summer months, with the heavy boat traffic traveling under the bridge, the wait to get accross could be up to 25 minutes. Totally unacceptable for any emergency response. The other bridge was the A. Piatt Andrew bridge on route 128. This bridge is close to some areas of West Gloucester, but is many miles from Magnolia. If an emergency vehicle had to use the A. Piatt Andrew route to get to Magnolia it could take twenty minutes. Again, quite unacceptable.

The areas of Lanesville, Annisquam and East Gloucester may be located on the island with the central fire station, but they are miles from the main station and must be accessed by small two lane roads with many curves and hills. On a good day it can take fifteen minutes to get from the central station to the outer reaches of the Lanesville community. The East Gloucester community is located much closer to downtown, and most citizens believe it can be safely served by the central station, that is most citizens except those of East Gloucester who had gotten used to having their own substation for many years. The service of these outlaying communities by one central station is widely thought to be unsafe by most of the citizenry.

Now Gloucester uses the basic Mayor/City Counselor form of government. There are counselors for each of the local wards, and these wards are basically representative of the named communities, as well as a number of at-large counselors who are supposed to represent interests citywide. The Mayor and the Counselors have the task of assigning the city tax revenue from water and sewer fees, beach parking (beach parking receipts topped three million last year), and all the other city/tax surces, as well as from state and federal grants, to the areas where it is most needed. In the years since proposition two -

- and a half, rules limiting the amount of tax that can be assessed and how much such taxes can increase annually, the mayor and the counsel have had to designate more and more money to aggressive police and fire fighter contracts from a smaller pot increase than they were used to getting. In retaliation the powers that be voted to shut down the fire substations, which saves a lot of salary money but endangers thousands of lives. Folks from those communities were outraged and brought their ire to the counsel meetings. It got heated to say the least. The mayor, and the majority of counsel members told the tale of how there was not any money to pay the salaries of men or women to man the outlying stations. They said there was no other area from which to draw it. They offered that if the voters were willing to override proposition two and a half that they could generate the tax dollars to fund the stations. The voters rejected this by a resounding margin.

As these debates got more and more heated the books were opened up and examined. It showed that police overtime costs were out of hand. Road details were taking such a chunk of the budget that it left nothing for real public safety. Tax breaks on property to the few big businesses angered some. The two largest employers in the city, Varian Semiconductor and Gortons had got a number of breaks of property and water taxes, but they generated many, many jobs for the city so it could be seen as an offset. Many citizens were fresh off the anger of having to have paid around \$10,000.00, per household to have new sewers installed by federal mandate. They could not understand how the federal authorities could order this, the archaic sewer systems were polluting the Annisquam and ocean, but that they would have to cover the bill. Some homeowners had to actually sell their properties because they could not afford the fee.

Now the debate was capped off by tragedy. During one holiday season a fire broke out in West Gloucester. This would be the optimal time of year for rapid response time from the central station. The fire was called in a minute or two after it started. It took the trucks from the central station close to eight minutes to respond.

- The shut down West Gloucester substation was 45 seconds away. One woman died in the fire and another was severely burned. It was determined by the fire marshall that if a truck was able to have been dispatched from the shut down substation no one would have died. The tragedy polarized folks. It put a real human face on the struggle.

At this point we need to look back at Gloucester politics. A few local names, men who have operated family business in the area, have always been the power brokers. They owned the counsel. The rules were designed to benefit them. For many years it was not a big deal as most citizens of Gloucester were too busy working on the fishing boats, laboring on the docks, making fish sticks at Gortons, or were just from the hardworking class of folk who left the politics up to the politicians. With the changing face of the city, fishing jobs on the decline, more retail and technology jobs, and on the heels of the fire station tragedy, more and more common folk decided to get involved. The city was at a turning point. It could either self destruct and turn into a Newburyport, a city no longer connected to its roots, or possibly a New Bedford, a city ravaged by unemployment and the social ills that come with it, or it could be revitalized. It could look for new breath on the docks.

Election time is always a colorful time in small city politics, *rule* and Gloucester is no exception to this rule. They have the type of home-grown candidates that have the true essence of the local flavor. The problem was that the power brokers had been getting their men elected through strong publicity campaigns hinged upon the old fashion greenback method. Promises were made, but seldom kept. Ideas were presented, but hardly ever brought to fruition. It was a laugh, politics as usual they said on the docks and in the bars. But this time was different. Someone died, unnecessarily. Hadn't they been telling them the substations needed to be opened at all costs? This time it was too much. The old school, good ole boy Gloucester families in the power structure had let them down. They had there cake and ate it too. A woman was dead. Another was scarred for life. It was time for a change.

The sitting mayor said he would not run for another term. The City Counsel president, a man from an old Gloucester family, a family fully entrenched in the good ole boy network, said he planned to run and was immediately listed in the papers as the favorite. There were some other salt of the earth candidates, some real Gloucester originals, but it was doubted that they could run a city of 30,000 with no experience. One other candidate did show some guts though. She was a transplant, not a popular thing in an insular community like Gloucester, but she had been living there now for close to two decades. She had ideas that made sense. She talked about getting the fire stations open and actually had a financial plan that would work. She talked "Gloucester", that is what was good for the people who lived there, not what would be good for the modern day carpet baggers. She had education, she had business experience and she showed compassion.

The wagons were beginning to circle. The good ole boy's candidate used the "outsider" card. His opponent was not from Gloucester. She did not know the community. His big money supporters blanketed the community with flyers, signs, ads, and petitions. This only sparked the grassroots effort by his opponent. She got a lot done on a shoestring and it impressed people. As election day approached she closed the mark.

It took guts for a woman to take the bully pulpit and state she would fight the outrageous police contracts. It took more guts to say she would fight to replace mandated police road details with flagmen, like other states use, and how that savings alone could keep the substations open for six months of the year. She talked of revitalizing the waterfront by supporting old industries and developing new. She supported a business man who opened a new cruise port which was already creating jobs and bring dollars to the community stores. She took the high road and did not bash her opponent when it was uncovered his business had gone bankrupt not too many years ago, and that he had been investigated for tax inproprieties and forced to pay a substantial fee. She just told -

- of how she had made her own business thrive. She showed such character that even the local Gloucester press started to show her in a favorable light. You see Gloucester is "Nationalistic" in the citywise sense of the word. There are real working class men and women there who believe they can only be understood by their own. They were starting to look at this fresh blood as their own.

Election day came and the new blood won. The old guard on the council also took a major hit. A couple of the more level headed incumbents survived, but for the most part it was a clean slate. The people had spoken. Their mandate was issued. It is how the process is supposed to work. The people are at the head of the pyramid. Those below serve them. If the people are not served then those entrusted with that service need to go. It remains to be seen how it all plays out, whether or not the substations do get opened or how well the new mayors plans actually work when put into motion. Will she take the road crew argument to the State House? Can she defeat the unions? It's all up in the air. The one thing that is not up in the air is that the system can work. The voters can make a difference. Gloucester can teach other communities that you don't have to wait for tragedy to effect change. You as citizens know where the cities priorities are. You can get things going as soon as your servants stop representing your interests. It wakes up the potential candidates that their jobs are in your hands. Can it work on the national level? I think so. We have a new party in control of the House and Senate. Will they listen? They better or they will have to go.

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