

Chapter 23: Goodbye Earl, Hello Ray and Dave

When Earl Newton was sworn in as Ward 4 Council member, twenty-some years had passed since the first official had been sworn in to serve as member of the town's elected governing body. Over the course of this time and with very few exceptions, the membership of the City Council had seemed remarkably compatible and cohesive. Not that there had been unanimity on every issue, but simply that the personalities and differences of opinion had for the most part seemed to be manageable and customarily civil. That all changed when Earl Newton became a member of the Council.

Those that knew Newton remember him as a cynic who believed that all politicians were corrupt. Prejudiced by this indoctrinate, Newton became what you might call a thorn in the side for his associates on the City Council, many of whom were often offended by his mordacious remarks. Overtime, the rift between Newton and his colleagues would grow. Not the least bit enthralled by the constant negativity and cynicism, the natural tendency of Council members was to eventually ignore his initiatives, --even when some of them had merit.

A notable event that perhaps did irreparable damage to the relationship occurred when Newton had the occasion to speak before a civic group in Yukon. At that meeting, Newton allegedly pulled out a wad of \$1 bills and indiscriminately tossed them out to the audience declaring in his characteristically misanthropic way, "that's how The Village City Council spends your money."

Then late in 1971, as Newton's regular attendance at meetings began to falter, his counterparts on the City Council started to silently take note. An eputation of sorts seemed to be in the making. Apparently, Newton was unaware of the City Charter provision stipulating that a member who missed more than half the meetings over a four-month period would automatically forfeit his or her seat on the City Council. Not surprisingly, Newton's colleagues on the Council did not consider it incumbent to impart that important gimlet of knowledge either. Meanwhile, Council members quietly counted the missed meetings as they passed until the legal threshold had finally been surpassed.

At the meeting of March 7, 1972, as Newton entered the Council Chambers, Mayor Roy Carmack served Newton with a letter containing the most unexpected news. Reading the letter in hushed silence, Newton's face became ashen and more pallid with each passing moment. The letter was candid and to the point: Newton had missed six (6) of the previous eight (8) meetings and in accordance with the provisions of the City Charter his seat on the Council had been vacated.

Newton, noticeably shaken, could do little more than express his displeasure with the action. Newton then abruptly turned to exit the Council Chambers. Departing the room in a huff, Newton turned toward the Council, and gruffly fired-off a parting volley, --one that today seems more bromidic than threatening: "I'll see you in the high back chairs of the courtroom," barked Newton as he departed the room in a conspicuous display of hostility.

The remaining members of the Council probably lost little sleep over the incident. The law was clearly on their side, and despite the malevolence that was evident nothing ever came of Newton's hollow threat.

Tom Graham, who was elected to succeed Newton at the next election, served in the Ward 4 position until he moved from The Village and was forced to relinquish his seat late in 1975. The untimely resignation left a vacancy on the Council that led to an extraordinary stalemate in which neither of two replacement candidates could obtain the necessary three votes to garner the appointment.

Council members Roy Carmack and Bob Blakeley supported Dave Barton for the vacancy. Barton was serving a stint on the Planning Commission at the time. Council members Wayne Schooley and Stan Alexander threw their support behind Jim Lancaster.

Both candidates were good men but neither side seemed willing to budge. The ensuing deadlock was remarkably civil but, if not for a mutually agreeable alternative, could have gone on for a long time.

To end the impasse, Councilman Alexander nominated Ray Potts, a well-respected and highly regarded member of the community, to serve the remainder of Graham's term. Potts, who at the time was a member of the Board of Adjustment, was appointed unanimously to fill the Council vacancy.

Potts lived up to his reputation as a "class act". Unfortunately, instead of filing for election in the spring of 1976, Potts opted to quietly bow-out of city government. Dave Barton, not one to be easily discouraged, ran for the seat and won it in a closely contested election. Barton would go on to serve twelve (12) consecutive terms before retiring from the Council in 2000.