

Out With The Old, In With The New

After Derek Slaughter's inauguration as Mayor, I wondered how long Bill Nichols would last. Not very long, as it turned out. In with the new and out with the old.

I worked with Bill on a few issues over the years, but mainly with respect to City Redevelopment which brought to the City Kohl's Department Store and resulted in a number of deals with surrounding landowners such as Wegmans. Bill's work on that project and his herding together the cats was nothing short of outstanding.

There were times when I thought Bill was imperious, but he was consigned to work with some very challenging minds, including a passionately determined Mayor. I cannot recall how many drafts of that Redevelopment Agreement I read and drafted, but there were many and Bill was of inestimable importance. Bill also had to deal with City Council, which initially was as much an opponent as it was a partner.

The nearly unsolvable puzzle was that the Kohl's project involved numerous moving parts. It took an individual with a great skillset to make it all fit together. Bill seemed to be that person. Bill also had an extraordinary amount of knowledge in terms of how to get and utilize state and federal funds. He used that ability with a number of other city projects which adorn our revitalized city.

In the *Sun-Gazette* article, Bill Nichols' six-figure salary was mentioned. Most people are unlikely to notice that his replacement, doubtless a high-priced "consulting firm", will probably be paid twice what Bill ever received. Will the results be as good? Do they have the relationship with the politicians and the knowledge of cash flow that characterized Bill? Time will tell.

When I worked with Bill, I analogized him to the great Robert Moses. That is a name that probably is not on the tongue of most people in this area. Robert Moses was often denoted as the man who built New York City. He was born to Emanuel Moses, department store owner, as well as Bella Silverman Moses, on December 18, 1888. He was a Yale graduate and received a Ph.D. in political science from Columbia University in 1914.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Robert Moses played a "larger than life" role concerning the construction, revitalization and expansion of New York City. Most of the projects that Robert Moses was responsible for still stand in New York City and have not been updated since. It is an unfortunate sign of the times that our once vaunted infrastructure now resembles that of the Third World.

According to one website, when Robert Moses, Chief of the State Park System, completed his life's work, New York had 2,567,256 acres of park land. He was a

primary catalyst in the construction of 658 playgrounds in New York City, 460 miles of parkways and 13 bridges.

As a youngster, I recall the griping that accompanied the Throgs Neck Bridge, linking Fort Schuyler on the Bronx side with Fort Totten on the Long Island side. That was a Robert Moses dream come true. George Washington had rowed his troops from Long Island to the Bronx to escape the British invasion of Long Island. The construction of the bridge was a development in ugliness. The gigantic structure totally ruined the view looking down towards the East River from Long Island. Nevertheless, the Throgs Neck Bridge became a staple of how commuters travel to and from Long Island.

Undoubtedly everyone reading this op-ed has been on one of the bridges, through one of the tunnels or in one of the parks that Robert Moses was responsible for.

Is Bill Nichols Robert Moses? Well, chances are they will not have the identical lasting impact. However, in pro rata dollars, and I will never try that exercise, Bill might come close to having the utility to this City that Robert Moses had to New York City. I have not seen any major “thank you” to Bill Nichols, but perhaps that will occur when an official transition takes place. That will not keep me from saying “thank you” now to Bill Nichols, for his hard work, foresight, industriousness, and competency in dealing with politicians as well as property owners and the public. This is by no means to say that I always agreed with Bill. We had our different views and approaches but we worked together as colleagues for the good of the taxpayers of the City of Williamsport.

There is no question in my mind that Bill Nichols will be missed, and that the City of Williamsport will probably pay more to get less skill in connection with its future development. Hopefully, I will be totally wrong on that prediction.

*Clifford A. Rieders, Esquire
Rieders, Travis, Humphrey,
Waters & Dohrmann
161 West Third Street
Williamsport, PA 17701
(570) 323-8711 (telephone)
(570) 323-4192 (facsimile)*

Cliff Rieders is a Board-Certified Trial Advocate in Williamsport, is Past President of the Pennsylvania Trial Lawyers Association and a past member of the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority. None of the opinions expressed necessarily represent the views of these organizations.