

Dusty Rhodes, I think I owe you an apology.

When I first identified the troubling pattern of drastic cuts on commercial real estate valuations in the city center over the past 15 years, I was shocked. And scared. At something so big, so tangled and gangly and wrong. I wanted to blame someone. Because if you blame a person that means you can solve the problem. You just get rid of that person.

And so I started to blame Dusty. After all, it's his name on the ballot every four years. It had to be him. The Board of Revision is composed of 3 members, the county auditor, the county treasurer and an appointee from the county commissioners. I didn't really know what that meant. (I still don't, a fact I realized during my appointment with David Mann on Friday when he pointed out that Dusty doesn't actually hear the complaints – and so yesterday I wrote the Chief of Administration asking if I could attend a hearing.) But these men are ultimately responsible and so my buck stopped at Dusty.

But no matter how hard I tried to be mad at him, I couldn't get rid of this niggling doubt in the back of my brain. The only thing I trust in life is my personal experience and everything I have personally experienced in relation to the Auditor's office is positive. Dusty has returned my phone calls and responded to every email. He sent me to his chief of administration, Susan Silver, when he didn't know the answers. Susan has been polite, cooperative and fulfilled my public record requests with an attention to service that is comparable to top-level for-profit companies, always addressing me as "Dear Ms. Holwadel." She referred me to the very busy Terry Munz, a 40-year employee in charge of appraisals, and he seemed as honest and forthcoming as anybody I've ever met. None of them seemed like they had anything to hide.

And on top of that, there's the obvious fact that Dusty Rhodes has been the lone voice sounding the alarm on the long-term consequences of current public policies regarding commercial real estate development. It was his post on the Auditor's website from February 19, 2014 (http://www.hamiltoncountyauditor.org/pdf/news_TaxesBigGoveSubsidies.pdf) "Taxes, Big Government and Public Subsidies", that made me write him in the first place.

Those very acts of government involvement considered so necessary to get anything developed, to keep people here or attract new people, create an understandable impression among taxpayers that the system is unfair. It is also largely inexplicable as tax abatement, tax exemptions, and tax increment financing (TIFs) play favorites chosen by the politicians who created this whole hodgepodge in the first place.

Even though I am a liberal Democrat and Dusty is a brand of conservative I didn't think existed in the party, on this one issue, we are in complete agreement – probably because both of us have looked closely enough at the big picture to understand there's something very, very wrong.

Then yesterday I stumbled upon another possible explanation for the devaluation pattern, one that didn't have anything to do with elected representatives. Stuck in the middle of the search results for information on the 2011 Hamilton County reappraisal, I happened to notice a link to one of Cincinnati's biggest and most reputable law firms and clicked through to a compelling page on their web site explaining the property complaint process and potential benefits of successful representation.

Bazinga! Some of my best friends are lawyers at these big law firms. And they are really smart. The reason they bill outrageous amounts for every hour of their time is because they are worth it. It is entirely possible and highly probable that after the riots, our darkest days in recent Cincinnati history when nobody even wanted to come downtown much less own property here, attorneys recognized more sympathetic decisions coming out of the Board of Revision and they did their job. They

represented the interests of their clients and aggressively pursued any and all strategies to lower their costs of doing business.

The world is a complicated place, especially anything that involves money and people and politics. Blame is such a waste of time. Let's just fix the problem.

Thanks for all you do, Dusty and company – and forgive me for jumping to my over-simplified conclusions.

Kathy Holwadel in Cincyopolis blog, September 8, 2014

<http://cincyopolis.wordpress.com/2014/09/08/dusty-rhodes-i-think-i-owe-you-an-apology/>