

Andrew Carter

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Editorial - "Public Safety" or "Economic Development?"

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Amid major belt tightening in the proposed 2008/2009 budget, \$3.5 million was still found to fund the proposed walkway between Town Center and Pembroke Mall.

Many people agree that crossing Virginia Beach Blvd. is becoming increasingly difficult at certain times of the day, but is this cross walk really our most pressing public safety need? And how many of the people already at street level would walk up and back down two flights of stairs to use the new walkway rather than taking the more-direct route they do now?

With the city's limited resources, what is the highest and best use of these funds? What other uses might provide a greater benefit to residents?

I was surprised last year to learn that there is a five-year waiting list to upgrade street lights to newer, brighter bulbs - even though there is an overwhelming amount of data supporting the idea that increased lighting deters crime; criminals like to hide in dark place. Basic crime-prevention pamphlets from the police start by encouraging residents to turn on their porch lights and to buy brighter bulbs.

I was also surprised at how thin our uniformed police seem to be spread at a time when we have lost some of our most-experienced officers to retirement or to better paying Federal jobs.

I have not spoken to a single person over the past year who has told me they believe the proposed walkway is the most important safety issue in our city.

If the walkway isn't a public safety priority, does that mean that it's really an economic development priority? Wouldn't the walkway do more to benefit the nearby businesses than the average resident?

And if the walkway is really about economic development, shouldn't the city be using money from the TIF and SSD taxing districts that were created for Town Center rather than using money from the City's "General Fund" which pays for police and schools - especially since the goal of our Town Center investment was to give the city *more* tax revenue for police and schools?

And if the walkway is really about economic development, shouldn't we condition city funding on matching funds from the town center developers and the owners of Pembroke Mall?

What do YOU think? Let City Council know where YOU believe this \$3.5 million would do the most good.

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