

City of Marietta
Mayor William Dunaway -- 2007 State of the City

Comment on introduction

Thanks to Jason, Matthew, Bruce, Mary Anne

Steve and Virginia Tumlin story and Hickory Hills Park

Little Chickens of Marietta. Museum of History. Marilyn Rose, "Murray and Etta, Museum Mice"

Friends of the Strand, Billy Joe Royal, Wed, Oct 16th, Cowboys

I really wanted to give a true "State of the City" talk. I was looking forward to being a cheerleader, again. Marietta really does have some great things going on! I do have some great and new news, but, first, I need to talk about two critical issues for the state of our city.

I know that I will not be able to finish all of my prepared talk and the good news. So, for those of you who are really bored, my entire presentation, written and audio, will be on the city web site. I am glad both The Marietta Daily Journal and The Atlanta Journal-Constitution are here today. You might find it interesting to compare their reporting with the text of my presentation.

Today, I am either brave or very stupid to challenge both the paper and some members of the Georgia Legislature. You will have to decide which I am.

You know the saying, "Never pick an argument with someone who buys ink by the barrel." I hope I am not. I hope that Otis Brumby can accept what I feel I must do. As mayor, I cannot stay silent about what I know to

be the results and damage of these unfair attacks and judgments on the city, the city staff, and for the future of our city.

In many respects, we are very fortunate to have a home town newspaper. The MDJ does a beautiful job in many areas, such as local sports, state news, support of non-profits, human-interest stories, churches, etc.

Over the years, I have valued my friendship with Otis. I have great respect of Otis and his family and for the many good things they, and The MDJ, have done for Marietta and Cobb County through the years, and many times anonymously.

As an elected official, I know that my every word, deed, action are subject to question and criticism. I expect to get attacked and misinterpreted.

Harry Truman said, "If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen." Well, I'm a big boy; I can take it. As mayor, I just don't want the future of Marietta to take it.

The MDJ and Otis expect me to absorb personal attacks and name-calling, get knocked down, get back up, smile, and say "Thank you, sir, May I have another?" I have done that and I will continue to do that. I just don't think the city should have to do that.

I am speaking out, not in my own defense, but as Mayor for the future for all of us. I will admit that it does hurt to be used by someone whom I have considered a friend for 64 years.

Just like Otis expects me to absorb everything he says about my actions and me personally, I hope he will prove that he can take some straightforward criticism and disagreement and not seek revenge on the city and on me. We shall see if I am going to be vilified.

I want to give you just a few examples and the resulting bad effects of the continuing negative news stories and editorials, some with the intentional use of false figures and information.

The recent Fourth of July “flag” controversy stories had distortion and many false facts. A needless controversy created by the press. Some city staff members even received threats. Otis did promise a retraction of an editorial, but I have yet to see it.

When the city was assembling land for the now successful Manget TAD project, the paper just “had” to print the story prematurely. As a result, the prices of the remaining properties to be bought went up, costing the taxpayers thousands of dollars.

The city has lost several department heads, partly because they find it difficult to work in a hostile press environment. Otis, you just dismiss many people as just being “government bureaucrats;” these are good people who love this city, even more than I do. (Recognize staff)

More critically, in the past several years, we thought we were going to hire some new management personnel, but then they found out about the negative approach of the MDJ and they changed their minds.

I know of developers who will not consider coming to Marietta. They know redevelopment is difficult at best and almost impossible with a hostile newspaper. They prefer to go where their efforts are welcome.

I have been told by more than one real estate agent that they have a better chance of selling a home to someone if that person has not read the MDJ.

If you didn’t already know it, Otis Brumby hates TADs. With the exception of the Acworth TAD, where he controls a bank, he has sought to destroy and discredit all TADs, present and future. The MDJ has and is continuing to hurt the state of the city. I guess you could call the paper “TAD Phobic.”

Many people, smarter and higher positioned than I am, have tried to reason with Otis about TADs. His answer has been, and I quote, “I don’t care what you say about it, it’s still a subsidy for rich developers.” That’s why you have always read the word “subsidy” after any mention of TADs in the MDJ.

Let me give you a few examples of this “TAD-Phobia.” By the way, Otis has written that I have never met a TAD I didn’t like. That’s not true. However, I would like to see Otis meet a TAD he does like.

In the Marietta Daily Journal, you have read the phrases “failed TADs” “retro-TADs,” and “project-specific TADs.” Only the MDJ has these terms in its dictionary, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution does not, and I don’t think these phrases have ever been used before. In fact, most of the very successful TAD projects you see in and around Atlantic Station would be defined as “retro” and “project specific” TADs” by the MDJ. I have yet to hear why these terms are evil.

Of course, the MDJ always uses the phrase “controversial retroactive TADs.” Nowhere in the nation, except in the MDJ, is this legitimate redevelopment tool questioned and condemned.

There are no “failed TAD projects” in Marietta. True, we have two developers with severe financial problems caused by several factors. However, Marietta now has these two completed projects on the tax roles where we once had blighted properties. These properties are paying taxes and the TAD bonds will be paid off easily. This is at no cost to you or me and they are yielding a great profit for the city and school system with less transients, new homeowners and new buying power. These TAD projects have not failed; the bonds will be paid off; they have succeeded.

I am very concerned about the effects of the continued stories of “failed TAD projects.” I have no problem with the MDJ reporting true facts. However, I do know that negative reporting is killing the sales of the

remaining housing units at Frasier Park and Marietta Lofts, if not in the rest of the city.

As a method of discrediting TADs, Otis has attacked the city and me about the Marietta Lofts. Why should Marietta spend thousands of dollars for an audit when there is a good chance that the bank and the courts will obtain all this information for us for free? However, Otis knows as well as I do, the audit will not prove anything as far as the payout and use of TAD funds. The MDJ is just using the audit idea as another method of discrediting the city and all TADs. Tad Phobia.

According to the approved construction budget the bank and the city approved, Wes Godwin, just like any developer, was entitled to pay himself for overhead and profit. I do fault him for not paying his debts first before paying himself. However, this action is not illegal, but it's not the way many other people and I do business.

I do know that the bank and courts are taking depositions in this case and more information will be available with the coming court dates. In the meantime, Doug Haynie is examining the truthfulness of the affidavits that were signed each time before a TAD payment was made.

The paper is wrong and misleading in saying that, because of TADs, people are getting a "free ride" on the taxpayers. In our TAD districts, just look at the huge decrease in crime, the huge decrease in transients and transient students, the new homeowners with their wonderful new demographics and buying power. The taxpayers are profiting greatly because of these new projects.

Please, MDJ, just report true facts without interpretation and please go by the statement Otis Brumby made in a talk when he said that a journalist's responsibility was, "First, do no harm." Also, please, save your opinions and positions for their proper place, with true facts, on the editorial page. We all enjoy "straight-reporting" in news articles.

I do know of one TAD project that failed to happen in Marietta. It was at Johnny Walker Homes. Some two years ago we had a tremendous redevelopment project from Madison Retail. According to Otis Brumby, it had two faults; two of his very most dislikable factors: This project was under the creation of John Williams and it would have required a 6 million dollar TAD. Two strikes and you're out.

Come to think of it; this was the end of the honeymoon the city had with the MDJ.

Of course, I have been attacked about this with false information, but even Micky Blackwell and Roy Barnes were subjected to personal attacks. TAD phobia.

The votes were there, but after the MDJ campaign, the city council followed this attack and John Williams left town, never to return.

In fact, I know of several developers who are developing elsewhere rather than risk a press attack in Marietta.

If John Williams had started this project two years ago as intended, it would have been finished by now, having been built in a good real estate market. The city would have impressive and trend-setting mixed-use development that would have encouraged, and now started, other redevelopment all along Powder Springs St. and the blighted areas of Griggs and Henry Streets. We would have new shops, restaurants, and offices. More importantly, we would have 200 to 300 new homeowners, living, shopping and supporting our school system.

Yes, it would have required a TAD, which would be paying off by now. What is the price of having redevelopment delayed for 2 to 4 years?

Of course, both the paper and I knew that this site could and will be developed without a TAD. Myrick Company is now going forward with

Marietta Walk. It will be good and I am glad they are doing this, but it will not be of the same intensity, high level and investment that Madison Retail would have built and finished.

Myrick is now facing a down market, but they are proceeding. Understandably, they will be going slower considering the market we now have.

What is the cost of this delay?

I have more examples. Last January, Marietta had its first viable chance to redevelop a large section of Franklin Rd. It would have required a TAD. It may have worked, but we will never, never know.

The MDJ went into full attack on the developer and everything else. The developer, ABG, was putting together some very-well qualified partners and they had their financing. After the press attack, they decided they did not want to take on the difficulties of Franklin Rd. while contending with a non-supportive, hostile press. They have left, never to return. Other developers have noted this experience. TAD phobia.

What is the cost of delay? Last year alone, the Franklin Road area decreased in tax value. This was a DECREASE of \$176,000 in taxes in just one year for the city, county, and school system.

The recent editorials and articles about Wynhaven have been real goodies. These are some of the best examples of the intentional use of false facts to make points. Several people and I have given the paper the correct information on more than one occasion, but they have conveniently chosen to ignore this.

As a side note, Otis Brumby has now called me a “bully.” Does anyone, other than me, recognize the irony of Otis calling someone else a “bully?” I am disappointed that the paper is resorting to name-calling just to support their TAD Phobia.

Contrary to the MDJ, Bill Hagemann's self-serving lawsuit is only about the re-zoning. It has no mention about the price of land, the amount or even the existence of a TAD, and nothing about density as the MDJ says it does.

Currently, Wynhaven has 296 run-down transient apartments. The new project would have had only 235 owner-occupied town homes. Actually, it would have been a 21% decrease in current density with more green space, amenities, and home-owners. Not what the editorials have shouted. They have been given the true facts before.

“Didn't follow proper legal procedures?” The paper knows we did.

“Overpriced Tax Allocation District subsidy?” The 6.2 million bond was examined thoroughly by several groups and approved by 19 of the 20 elected officials. The amount of the proposed TAD was the result of close examination and not some guess or opinion by someone else.

In previous articles, the MDJ has attacked about the sales price versus the appraised tax value of the property. Otis Brumby is probably one of the most successful real estate owners in the state. I doubt if he has ever sold any of his properties for the appraised values. Anyway, this so called “requirement” for other appraisals only exists in the minds of the MDJ.

I am not angry with Bill Hagemann; I am disappointed. Many people think this self-serving lawsuit is frivolous. With his oath of office on the Marietta Housing Authority he should have known his increased responsibility for the well being of the city. Many people think he should have resigned with this legal action.

I do know that he has repudiated at least one settlement, he has successfully delayed action on this case in court, and he has even refused for his lawyer to see if a resolution could be made.

Because of this lawsuit, the Wynhaven project is now dead. These apartments are still causing problems for our schools, with our public safety, and code enforcement. These residents are practically all transients. Can anyone guess the amount of crime that may have been committed by the 1000 to 2000 transients who have lived there in the past several years? What is the cost of delay? I don't think anyone can even quantify this loss. Just more "TAD phobia."

There is one "perfect" TAD in Cobb County. It is the Manget development by Hedgewood. I wonder why you haven't read about this success in the MDJ. You haven't read about the huge investment over and above the TAD; the area improvements to utilities and sidewalks; the great improvement for the school system; the decrease in crime, the very real "halo" effect of this TAD. I wish the MDJ would admit that TADs do work. By the way, the same benefits are here because of Marty Littleton's Frasier Park and The Marietta Lofts.

Last week, my friend, Tom Downs, said, "Boy, Bill Kinney really jumped on you and the city." I had to point out that most of this editorial was not written by Bill, but inserted under his by-line at the direction of Otis Brumby. Otis has told me, himself, of times when he had his own words put under Bill's by-line. I know that many of you realize this.

Last TAD example: As the result the MDJ's campaign, the county commission has changed their previous, very thorough, demanding, and reasonable TAD guidelines. The new guidelines are very pleasing for the MDJ since it now restricts many things that have never been mentioned before, much less restricted, anywhere in Georgia, and probably nowhere in the United States. The true TAD experts I have discussed this with have never seen such restrictions.

I hope these guidelines are not the death-knell for future redevelopment in Marietta and Cobb County. We will try to work within this framework, but I am told it will be difficult, if not impossible, to get the quality and intensity of the redevelopment projects we must have. I do believe that,

now, many developers will not try to do redevelopment in our county.
More TAD Phobia.

Otis, I have always thought you loved our city. Please examine what you are doing to our future. We all need constructive criticism and I hope my talk today has been that for you.

I know that you will continue to examine and criticize. Constructive criticism is needed and wanted and sometimes well-deserved. Destructive criticism harms. None of us does everything right, but please, this effort to find fault with practically everything is causing harm for our future. Please quit trying to discredit the present and future use of all TADs.

Now for next issue for the future of our city:

For years, the state had a great Green Space Program that was easily administered at the local level. With this program Marietta bought over \$700,000 of new Green Space. The state was distributing 30 million dollars a year.

Now the state has a new program with only 5 million dollars a year. Even worse, the state has established a new bureaucracy, centralized decision making, favoring rural areas.

Beautiful, Ludowici already has green spaces; they are called pastures.

This has been a loss of Community Control and Home Rule.

Many of you know about QBE (Quality Basic Education) and the Austerity program for school systems. Under these programs, Marietta and Cobb School Systems MUST send 5 mills of their property taxes and

other monies to the state for re-distribution to other areas of the state as determined by the wise people in Atlanta.

As a result, just last year alone, The Cobb School System had to send 137.7 million dollars of your tax dollars to the state.

In last year alone, the Marietta School System had to send 14.2 million dollars of your tax dollars to the state.

Dollars never to be seen again, Bye-Bye.

I have mentioned the loss of Community Control with the Greenspace and QBE programs to lead into the next subject.

I know that I am now going to risk the wrath of some powerful legislators on me and on Marietta by speaking out against their newest idea. However, as Mayor, I must speak out when I know that something will be a disaster for local governments and school systems. Just like I do with Otis Brumby, I hope our legislators will be statesmen and not seek revenge on Marietta for my words.

Well now, if you like the changes in the Greenspace program and the administration of QBE and the more than 152 million dollars we are shipping out of the county every year, you are really going to love the next proposal from the legislature, called House Resolution 900.

The proponents have a misleading term for this called “G.R.E.A.T.,” which stands for get-rid-of-every-ad valorem-tax. First rule of communication: Get a “god term” to describe what you are trying to sell so that disagreement will be difficult.

Who could be opposed to this? Getting rid of all property taxes on homes and cars?

I think you should be opposed because in the on-going public relations campaign I have seen, the whole story is not being explained.

You, I, everyone, will have practically a total loss of Community Control-Home Rule over most of everything you expect from your local governments and schools. Our every budget item and plans for improvements would be subject to approval by the state instead of you, our citizens.

Now, I am sure that you do not agree with every decision that the school boards, Sam and the county commission, and the city council and I have made. However, it is real easy and efficient to grab a hold of our readily accessible collars and get our attention. It's very difficult to go to the state capital to convince 180 representatives and 56 senators of your each complaint and every need.

This is being promoted as property tax relief for the homeowner and it is until you realize the huge increases in other taxes and the loss of Community Control and Home Rule. You may not believe that local governments are efficient and responsive, but we are heckava lot more responsive than the state bureaucracies.

What they are not telling you is that a huge share of this proposed property tax abolition will be for corporations, large landowners, large farms, utilities, etc. They are not telling you about the huge increases of other taxes and the real potential loss of school and local government services.

This HR 900 proposes an initial all-inclusive sales tax of 5.75% on EVERYTHING, all sales and services, no exemptions on anything like medicine, food, etc. This means that your \$15,000 hospital bill, your next \$2000 legal bill, grocery and medical and prescription bills, your laundry bills, funeral expenses, etc. will have 5.75% added to it. I hope you don't think your friendly lawyer, Wellstar, insurance company, and Terry Pendley are going to absorb these new expenses.

Now, they don't call this a sales tax; the promoters of this plan are using another god term: "value added" tax. It's still a sales tax, pure and simple, except they want it embedded so we couldn't see the effect of the increased taxes. They are also incorrectly using the copy-written phrase "fair tax." This is not even a distant cousin to Neal Boortz's Fair Tax.

All SPLOSTs would be eliminated. All Community Controlled bonds to finance new schools, new parks, new roads, etc. would be eliminated, no matter how much the citizens want to vote and approve these projects. No voter referendums would be allowed.

All TAD financing would be eliminated. Put that with the elimination of property taxes and the redevelopment of many blighted areas, such as Franklin Rd. would be impossible

The financing ability for all Community Improvement Districts would be eliminated. All future great improvements by the Cumberland and the Town Center CID's would be eliminated. The Downtown Marietta Development Authority would have no money to sponsor the Concerts in the Square, tourism, the museums, and other downtown activities.

If passed in any form, HR 900 means a huge loss of Community Control--- Home Rule---from you. A huge concentration of power and control would be transferred to the state legislature. All local governments, all school boards, all authorities would have to go to the state, hat in hand, and beg for even for a new fire truck.

I have a big picture of all school systems, cities, county governments and other authorities lining up at the state capital trying to get their yearly allowances.

I remember my father, when I asked about my allowance, saying, "He, who controls the money, controls you." I didn't do well in my allowance negotiations back then either.

Who knows what new, large, bureaucracy will have to be created for this?

With our experience with QBE, I am sure that no one in this room thinks that Cobb County and Marietta will get back anything close to the millions of dollars that will be leaving this county for re-distribution across the state.

What has happened to the conservative belief that government power should be kept at the local level---home rule---and not concentrated to a central government?

Enough of this “happy talk.” Let’s talk about what’s the good news for Marietta’s future:

Have to wait until Monday for an announcement.

Marietta does have the lowest millage rate of any city in Cobb County and one of the lowest millage rates of cities in the metro area.

We have received another \$200,000 for our Weed and Seed program on Franklin Rd. With the cooperation of civic organizations, citizens’ groups, Federal Law enforcement personnel, the County Police Dept., and the Sheriff, we are seeing a real improvement in the quality of life and a marked decrease in crime.

As you know, on Franklin Rd., we are in court to tear down the nightclub eyesore and trying to revoke the licenses of the Q Club.

In conjunction with the Marietta Redevelopment Corporation, the County, the Marietta Housing Authority, and Senator Isackson, the city is increasing our efforts for major redevelopment on Franklin Rd. Everyone agrees that a major redevelopment in this area will probably need some TAD funding. If HR 900 passes, TAD funding will be outlawed.

The MRC is in the midst of creating a master plan for redevelopment of the Hedges-Gramling area. The city is working on other areas also.

Currently, Marietta has over 900 new owner-occupied homes under construction. We also have over 195,000 sq.ft. of new commercial and office space. Marietta has not seen such a building boom in 50 years!

We have sponsored a very successful “Big Picture” showcase for potential buyers and developers. We have completed marketing studies and together with “good news” from the Marietta School System we are promoting Marietta to home buyers, developers and real estate people.

We have established a new web site, www.MoveToMarietta.com so that everyone can have access to the “Good News” to help our real estate market. By the way, last year of all our new home sales, an astounding 89% of the buyers were moving into town from out in the county. That really helps traffic congestion.

The city has a very useful website. In conjunction with this we have started Marietta E-News that goes out once a week. We have thousands of subscribers and I invite you to sign up to learn more “good news” about your town.

With the lead of the Marietta Housing Authority, our school system, and Cobb Housing, we have all established several “homebuyers” programs for city employees, school system employees, and citizens. These are not seminars; some of these programs have significant help with down payments and interest rates.

As a side note, if HR 900 passes, I don’t know where we could find some of the funding for many of these efforts.

We are working for a massive upgrade of many of the city parks. We will be breaking ground for an \$850,000 re-do of Henry Park on Wright St.

Much of this money is coming from TAD money. Unfortunately, with the new County Guidelines, future park and area improvements in a TAD district will not be possible.

Marietta should have a Parks Master Plan completed by February, 2008. This will be for our recreational needs, including the newly-acquired Hickory Hills. If HR 900 passes, I don't know where the funds will come from.

With our speed up of our road SPLOST funds, we will be moving up the start dates of many needed new projects for traffic improvements, better looking streets, and the needed replacement of the bridge on Kennesaw Ave. The paper said for us not to do this for the only reason that "no other city had ever done this before."

I am still hopeful of finding new funding for the critically-needed Powder Springs Road Connector with South Cobb Dr. Without the diversion of a huge amount of through traffic off of Powder Springs St., I know that the Powder Springs St. area redevelopment will not be as good as possible. The County's proposed Macland Rd. connector, when built, will not give the necessary relief that Marietta must have. (Windy Hill)

This argument of waiting for the Macland Connector is just like the one we all heard 15 years ago that went, "Just wait until the East-West Connector is finished and it solve all of Marietta's traffic problems."

In conjunction with SPLOST projects, Marietta is starting Streetscape projects on Franklin Rd., Roswell St., Fairground St., and Powder Springs St. These will become "parkways" with four lanes, divided medians, wide brick sidewalks and landscaping with trees, period street lamps, AND no overhead utility wires.

Just like you and me, trees have a definite life span. Many of the trees you admire along our streets in Marietta will die in the next 10 to 30 years. Additionally, we have many main streets that need trees and landscaping.

Marietta has completed plans to address the planting of new trees. We do have some funds in our “Alternative Tree Program,” and we hope to have more funds for the \$390,000 plan that we have now. I hope this will just be a start.

We are in the process of completing the Mountain to the River Pathway. We are also designing other pathways to connect to other parts of our city and county.

With the cooperation and urging of the city, WellStar is making much-needed road and traffic improvements in its area.

If you haven’t driven in the area around Kennestone, ride around; you will be amazed at the amount of new private investment finished and under construction. WellStar is a true economic engine for Marietta.

Speaking of economic engines, have many of you realized what economic engines Southern Poly, the revitalized Life University, Chattahoochee Tech, and Kennesaw University are? That’s in addition to all of their other contributions to our quality of life.

One of the public perception problems the city has is that every time an area crime is reported in the Atlanta media, they say it happened in “Marietta.” Most of the time this crime actually has occurred outside our city limits and our jurisdiction. The site of the crime just happens to have a Marietta mailing address.

The city has worked hard and successfully to stop problems at Burruss and Wildwood Parks. Now Life University is giving Marietta help. They are re-locating their new Campus Police Office to Barclay Circle, across the street from the Burruss Park entrance. They are coordinating with the city with their presence and patrols.

The city is starting a much-needed re-paving project, spending \$1,500,000. We still need to do more.

If HR 900 passes, I know of some sources that will not be available. Remember, if it passes, the community, the citizens, could not even vote for Road bonds, Parks bonds, school bonds, or any kind of SPLOST programs, no matter how much you wanted the improvements. All of the above, together with TAD financing, would be outlawed.

Marietta is having great results in our Code Enforcement. We have increased the number of inspections. We are taking actions against a huge number of zoning and code violations. We will have a better city.

We are fortunate to have the Marietta Board of Lights and Water with its on going Capital Replacement Program to replace aging wires and pipes before they fail. Additionally, the BLW is doing massive up-grades to our capacity to serve our redevelopment, the new courthouses, and the Kennestone area. We are just now finishing the city's largest up-grade of power capacity. This is on---rather, under---Roswell St. Very soon, like all our other streetscape projects, we will have many parkways with no overhead utility wires.

I am proud of, but not satisfied with Marietta's progress. I know that I will not be satisfied in the next few years. We have to keep on going. You know I will continue to stand back up.

Your city is now "walking the talk," and sometimes we are running.

To paraphrase Robert Frost: "promises to keep, miles to go before we sleep."