



MEMO

Date: 10-30-09

To: Citizens of Amelia Village

From: Mayor Leroy Ellington

Subject: WHY WAS THE CHRISTMAS PARADE RE-NAMED "A HOLIDAY PARADE?"

Let me provide a bit of background on this very sensitive issue:

For roughly the last 10 years, since I have been involved in Amelia Village, The Amelia Christmas Parade has always been hosted by a third party committee like The Amelia Christmas Committee, or for the last few years by the Amelia Business Association.

The Village **had no active role in organizing the parade**, inviting participants or making the rules...our role has always been as the facilitator of the event, issuing the permit for closure of the road, providing Police, and hosting an event for staff and volunteers at the municipal building after the parade.

For the last few years the parade was run by The Amelia Business Association. A few months back the Amelia Business Association informed The Village that they were unable to host the parade, and wanted to hand it over to the Village.

I spoke with our attorney regarding whether the Village could host "A Christmas Parade". Our lawyer indicated that due to the issue of Separation of Church and State, the best way to have "A Christmas Parade", was to have a third party organization host the event.

She further indicated that if the Village hosted "A Christmas Parade", we would be putting ourselves at risk of being sued on the Separation of Church and State issue. (First Amendment of U.S. Constitution) And that even though it may seem silly, the legal fees that the Village would spend to defend "A Christmas Parade" would be costly.

We (Council and I) asked for volunteer committees to be assembled (at televised Council meetings) to continue the tradition of "A Christmas Parade", there were no takers.

A local Girl Scout troop was interested in hosting the parade but the folks at their Corporate Headquarters would not allow them to host "A Christmas Parade".

We asked the Amelia Chapter of the Boys and Girls Club and they were very excited about it...but the folks at their Corporate Headquarters would not allow them to host "A Christmas Parade".

With time running out, to be able to organize the event at all... and with no volunteers to run the event as a "Christmas Parade" Council took no action, hoping that someone would step up.

A few days later my wife, approached Council and asked if she could host the parade. My wife's reason for hosting the parade was to keep the 29 year old parade tradition going and to continue to honor the hard work that had been done by the parade's founder.

The only problem is that as an individual she needed to provide the appropriate proof of event insurance, by purchasing a one day insurance policy at a cost of well over \$500. (cash out of her pocket.)

At this late date there was no opportunity to fund raise, as it was already late October.

At that point Council was left with 2 options

- 1) Change the parade to "A Holiday Parade" to reflect the diversity of the Holiday season. Appoint a compliance officer to make sure that the event reflected diversity, this way, the parade could be hosted by the Village, and this great community tradition would continue. (Our insurance would cover the event...this scenario was approved by our attorney)
- 2) Not have the parade at all.

That all being said...Council agreed to host a "Holiday Parade" event as a Village sanctioned event and appointed my wife as the committee chairperson, she and the Village Recreation Commission Chairperson would organize the event with guidance from the parade's founder, along with the help of volunteers. (Utilizing the Village's insurance)

My wife, the Village Recreation Committee Chairperson and the parade's founder had all been working very hard to be able to keep the parade going and had added some elements to the event that would make it the best and most exciting parade ever.

I know that this is a sensitive issue for everyone, but please understand that Council desperately wants to see the parade continue for years to come, however if the Village (a governmental entity) were to decide to host "A Christmas Parade", there is a very real possibility that we would be sued. (First Amendment Issue)

At the very least....Amelia Village taxpayers would be burdened to pay the Village attorney to defend their decision to host the parade as "A Christmas Parade".

The last 2 years here in the Village have been tough, working our way through the effort to dissolve the Village, and residents calling for greater fiscal responsibility.

Can you only imagine if the Village was to be sued for hosting a Christmas Parade, then having to spend tax dollars to defend their actions, especially after having been advised by our attorney that we would probably be sued?

It does not sound fiscally responsible to me.

While I appreciate the passion that people have with regard to this subject, it is my hope that our intent will be understood as being honorable, and that while unfortunate, re-naming the parade under these circumstances, was in fact in the best interest of the residents of Amelia Village.

Sincerely,
Leroy Ellington, Mayor