

The Post and Courier

Don't derail plan for Union Pier

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I read with interest Professor Want's commentary. I am not associated with either the State Ports Authority or the Southern Environmental Law Center, but as a resident of One Vendue Range, which is one of the larger condominium complexes in the vicinity of Union Pier, and a Charleston resident for over 25 years, I have a perspective somewhat different than Professor Want's.

First, I agree with the professor that clean air and water are essential to Charleston, and also that a successful port with some level of cruise ship activity is essential.

I also agree that select environmental law suits have played a key role in the lower levels of air pollution and water pollution nationwide and in South Carolina. Unfortunately, I found the rest of the commentary to be wanting with respect to relevant facts.

Air pollution in Charleston is lower now (2005 data) in essentially every major category than in 2000, which was lower than 1990 (<http://www.city-data.com/city/Charleston-South-Carolina.html>).

In 2002, the Charleston tri-county area had 14,493 tons of PM_{2.5} (finest particulate) pollution from all sources (VISTA BaseG2 County Summaries). To be even tougher, Charleston County PM_{2.5} pollution in 2002 was 3,128 tons (DEHC VISTA Base G2 County Summaries) and all port-related pollution was 175 tons (2005 data — Moffat and Nichol, 2008) or about 5.6 percent. However, all ships were 58 percent of the total or about 102 tons.

In 2010 there will be roughly 2,000 ships entering Charleston, and if there were 100 cruise ships (the actual number is 67) they would be about 5 percent of the ship total and thus about would have contributed five to six tons of fine particle pollution or 0.2 percent of Charleston County's total.

Moreover, whatever air pollution there is from the cruise ships would be mitigated by the elimination of three rail switches per day and 1,800 vehicles per week due to moving the cargo operations to Columbus Street. The point is, even if I'm wrong by a factor of two because there isn't consistent data for a single year, cruise ship air pollution is not a major threat.

What about water pollution? There hasn't been a cruise ship cited for a maritime pollution violation in Charleston in the last 10 years. Moreover, Carnival doesn't discharge anything within 12 miles of the coast, well beyond U.S. and international requirements. Again, not a real issue.

While I would like to see smaller cruise ships in Charleston's harbor, economics argues for the larger ships the SPA has agreed to — i.e., everyone from harbor pilots to cleaning crews earn more with larger ships. And, having them dock in Charleston does bring business to hotels, restaurants, the market, and tour operators.

Also, while the silhouette of a cruise ship may not be a great addition to the skyline, it is, in my humble opinion, much better (two days a week) than the ugly waterfront buildings that have ruined the waterfront for more than two decades (seven days a week).

Finally, as a businessman who has made a number of capital investment decisions similar to the SPA's in the Union Pier plan, I know the frustration of making investment decisions when there is uncertainty (beyond normal market forces) about when the investment will begin to pay back. The SPA has, in my opinion, worked hard to get community input and develop a plan that will dramatically change the Union Pier area for the betterment of all of Charleston's residents.

The facts don't support Professor Want's concerns, and the threat of a SELC suit (I received the donation request) will only waste a lot of money and potentially derail a viable plan to improve the Union Pier area.

Let's not let this be a case of 'no good deed goes unpunished.'

William B. Hewitt

Prioleau Street

Charleston

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