

PERSONALLY SPEAKING

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BRIDGING THE DIFFERENCES AT FORSYTHE

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The fundamental purpose served by any bridge is to unite two communities that otherwise are physically separated. In the case of the bridge that for years has been proposed at the Forsythe location, the two communities are separated by more than just a physical barrier. The West Monroe community wants a bridge at Forsythe to ease the burden of commuting across the Ouachita River. The Garden District community resists a bridge at Forsythe in the main because the increased traffic flow would disrupt the peace and tranquility of their community. The Forsythe bridge in other words presents a zero-sum scenario. If West Monroe prevails and the bridge is built, the Garden District loses. If the Garden District continues to be successful in resisting the bridge, West Monroe loses. Is there any way to build a bridge at Forsythe and achieve a positive-sum outcome? Yes, provided both communities can agree to *limits* in the way the bridge would be built and used. What is needed from both communities is *moderation* in the pursuit of their different interests.

A simple draw bridge limited to two lanes of traffic at Forsythe should be sufficient to meet the basic needs of the West Monroe community without creating major construction or traffic flow problems on either the west end of the bridge or the east end. To meet the basic needs of the Garden District community, access to the bridge should be limited in two major ways. First, only four-wheel vehicles would be allowed to use the bridge. Motorcycles (due to their noise) and other vehicles would be strictly prohibited. Surveillance cameras would be installed to provide clear evidence of violations of this limit, and stiff fines would be imposed with the revenues earmarked for helping operate and maintain the bridge.

Second, except in traffic emergencies – to be defined by the Monroe and West Monroe city governments and the Ouachita Parish Police Jury – the bridge would operate only between the hours of 6AM and 9PM. Gates would have to be installed to block traffic during non-use hours. They would be opened and closed by the bridge tender. Thus there would be no bridge traffic during those hours when most people in the Garden District are at home and asleep. Other limits on use might be imposed on major holidays such as Christmas and Easter.

Additionally, to reduce the overall width of the bridge in order to better accommodate to the streets on either end of the bridge, foot traffic and bicycles

would be banned from using the bridge. At least one pedestrian bridge would be constructed to carry foot traffic safely across Forsythe Avenue.

A bridge is like a stent that opens a blocked artery to the flow of blood to the heart. Without a bridge at Forsythe, commercial arteries are clogged and subject to failure which in turn means failure of the economy on both sides of the Ouachita River to grow and provide better and more convenient work, leisure, and housing opportunities for local residents. Locating the bridge anywhere else is the equivalent of putting a stent in an artery that is not blocked.

Build a bridge at Forsythe, with the proper limits on use, and we are more likely to avert such a failure. The choice reduces to: either change and adapt or stand fast and fail.

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