

My Freaking Genius Idea

It's time to invite The Daily Show to Salem. I'm a big fan of their special reports, which often feature a correspondent venturing to a town and interviewing residents about some off-beat goings-on.

Hey, Jon Stewart and company! This is Salem, Oregon calling. We've got plenty of weird stuff happening at City Hall. It's tragicomic to those of us living here, but Comedy Central viewers would focus on the funny side.

I've got ideas for some sketches.

These just scratch the surface of the absurdities that our city officials — Mayor Peterson, City Manager Norris, Public Works Director Fernandez, and others — have been inflicting upon Salemians.

First up, the completely unnecessary 2013 U.S. Bank tree killings.

Interviewer: “Mr. Fernandez, you are the Public Works director of an Oregon town that is proud of winning 38 consecutive Tree City USA awards. Your department received an application to cut down five beautiful healthy downtown trees. The City's tree experts, independent arborists, and members of the public all advised you to prune, rather than kill, the trees. So naturally you decided to save the trees, right?”

Fernandez: “No, I issued an order to kill them.”

U.S. Bank president Ryan Allbritton, who asked for the trees to be cut down but never could supply a good reason for doing this, also needs to be featured in The Daily Show special report.

Interviewer: “Mr. Allbritton, I understand that a French chef was arrested in your lobby for screaming in outrage about what a giant bank had done. If this is illegal, why isn't most of the American public behind bars?”

Allbritton: [mute irritated look]

Then there's got to be a bit about the newest WTF to emerge from City Hall, the notion of converting the Salem Public Library into a police facility.

This is for real. A much-needed \$250,000 remodeling of the Children's Room using private funds is on hold while city staff ponder the pros and cons of un-booking the library building.

A sketch comes to mind.

Children are sitting on the floor, enjoying Storytime. A SWAT team bursts in, body armor on, brandishing batons. "Exit the room! Hands up!" they yell at the startled children, parents, and library staff. "The library is now a police station, per order of the Salem City Council!"

A tough-guy construction crew marches in. They cut up the Storytime posters, shelves, and books with chainsaws while demolishing the walls with sledgehammers. Pieces of a jail cell are assembled in what used to be the Children's Room.

Lastly, City Manager Linda Norris' personal takeover of the duly-selected Salem Downtown Partnership has humor potential.

This would be a Daily Show re-creation, in grainy black and white, showing the new one-person downtown organization communicating with the City of Salem about policies affecting the Historic District.

Norris looks in a mirror, asks herself how she is doing, and hears her lips say, "You're doing a heck of a job for downtown, Linda."

Strange Up Salem seeks to lift our city's Blah Curse. Give us a Facebook like. Brian Hines blogs at hinesblog.com