

## Keep Fighting, Good Citizens of Salem

Viva la Revolution! Ongoing variety. After Americans revolted in 1776 against an external oppressor, Great Britain, we've continued to fight against internal threats to democracy, liberty, and the broad public interest.

So here's a big shout-out to the citizen activists in Salem who protest wrongs that need to be righted. Without your forebears, we wouldn't have a country.

Nor equal rights for women, blacks, and gays. Nor environmental, workplace, and consumer protections. Nor so many other achievements that began with a few people echoing Network's noted line, "We're mad as hell, and we're not going to take it any more."

I've been there. Done that. Still am.

Thus I feel much empathy for the No Third Bridge folks who've put in so much effort attending meetings, educating citizens, testifying at hearings, and otherwise raging against an unneeded Bridgasaurus that threatens to trample Salem's livability and pocketbook.

Ditto for the Stop Downtown Parking Meters activists who've tirelessly worked to gather petition signatures for an initiative aimed at preventing a parking meter proposal from going into effect that could deeply hurt small downtown businesses.

There are so many other local activists. Sorry I couldn't mention you all.

Activism is tough. Usually defeats outnumber victories at first. The Power Structure is aptly named: it's difficult to impact. Politicians, government officials, and corporate interests have deep connections.

Like Don Quixote, us citizen activists can feel like we're dreaming the impossible dream, fighting the unbeatable foe, righting the unrightable wrong.

Maybe Rosa Parks felt that way after she refused to give up her bus seat to a white person. Could she imagine that nine years later the Civil Rights Act

of 1964 would outlaw discrimination once so firmly engrained in American culture?

One determined person can make a difference. I tear up from the Man of La Mancha lyrics:

“This is my quest, to follow that star... No matter how hopeless, no matter how far... To fight for the right, without question or pause... To be willing to march into Hell, for a Heavenly cause.”

Keep fighting, good citizens of Salem. Remember: your opponents aren't evil.

Often they suffer from Groupthink, a malady diagnosed by someone who testified at a recent City Council meeting. It is exacerbated by an isolation from outside influences.

The treatment? Opening up flows of information, discussion, collaboration, decision-making. Transparency. Listening to both sides. Considering creative alternative options. Doing this sincerely, not with lip service.

Huston Smith quotes a Zen friend. “I have a new koan: I could be wrong.” Beautiful. The best revolutions happen when people in power revolt against their own dogmatic attitudes and actions.

Often, though, they need the aid of a citizen activist pin to help puncture the Groupthink balloon in which they have encased themselves. City leaders, don't fear this.

Activists like me aren't out to get you. We're trying to help you make better decisions by facing facts and public values head-on, honestly engaging with the citizens you serve.

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Strange Up Salem seeks to lift our city's Blah Curse. Give us a Facebook like. Brian Hines blogs at [hinesblog.com](http://hinesblog.com)