

## Time to Take Back this Town

Readers, I've enjoyed writing this column for the past two years. But Salem Weekly is moving in a new direction, so this will be my last Strange Up Salem offering.

I will, though, be keeping my Strange Up Salem Facebook page active. So give it a "like" if you want to read my musings about what's happening in town, strangeness-wise. And I'll still be blogging at [www.hinesblog.com](http://www.hinesblog.com)

At first it was tough for me to figure out what I should say in this final column. I felt pressure, like I was dying and the people around my bedside wanted to hear some marvelously profound Last Words.

Then I realized, it's simple, just be real. Don't try to be anyone other than who you truly are; don't try to say anything other than how you really feel.

Authenticity. Ah, a theme.

After thirty-eight years of living in or near Salem, I realize that individuals in this town are creative, lively, and caring. When my wife and I consider moving, it's the people we know and love that are a main magnet keeping us here.

In my previous Strange Up Salem columns I've bounced back and forth between the personal and the political.

What I've struggled to understand is how a city filled with so many wonderful people is so lacking in many ways. Somehow individual energy and enthusiasm gets sidetracked before it can impact serious problems.

Which gets us into the realm of the political. There's a hard-heartedness lying under Salem's feel-good veil that bothers me a lot.

Salem currently is being led by a Mayor and City Council majority who view citizen participation as an irritant. They put on outward happy-face smiles in public meetings while fuming inside when anyone challenges their predetermined policy pronouncements.

Their policies almost always bow at the altar of Salem's version of the 1%, who already are rich and powerful, yet desire more wealth and influence. Not coincidentally, municipal elections typically are bought by money from the Chamber of Commerce and special interest groups.

So even though Salem's citizens authentically want their town to be more environmentally friendly, caring of our historic heritage, compassionate toward those in need, and economically equitable, the Powers That Be divert our attention from pressing problems by trying to persuade us that everything is fine, don't listen to the boo-birds, and, hey, how about that Angry Owl?!

Sadly, the Statesman Journal, a sorry excuse for a community newspaper, has surrendered its journalistic credentials, including any attempts at serious investigative reporting, and become a simplistic cheerleader for the Pollyannaish civic boosterism crowd, filling its pages with human interest stories.

Our City officials would rather waste half a billion dollars on an unneeded Third Bridge than deal with problems concerning the homeless, bicycle infrastructure, tree preservation, downtown vitalization, earthquake safety, and many other pressing concerns.

Salemians need to take back their town. Speak out loudly, confidently, passionately. And vote! In every election, May and November.