

We've Entered the 3rd Stage of Truth

By Craig Della Penna, Realtor

Have you ever heard of the concept of The Three Stages of Truth? **FIRST it is ridiculed. SECOND it is violently opposed. THIRD it is accepted as being self-evident. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860)**

Most of you know me as the Realtor® specializing in the sale of houses near rail trails, but many of you probably don't know my background in the efforts to create an interconnected network of rail trails throughout the northeast. In 1994, while working for the railroad, managing large-scale transloading facilities, I was invited by a regional publisher to write a series of recreational guide books about the developing network of rail trails.

The first book was about New England, then New Jersey and later New York. Over the next several years, my wife and I ended up visiting hundreds of these places. Every weekend, we'd go out, bike the trail, researching the history, what sort of old RR archeology was still visible, the conversion process, what sort of change came to town, etc. The first book came out in 1995, and it was a hit. Not a Tom Clancy novel for sure, but I was getting calls to speak on the subject.

Then around 1996, I watched the idea of a trail get voted down in nearby Southampton. This was the only community on the entire 84 mile corridor to New Haven that voted down the trail. Turns out that a lot of older folks were concerned about outsiders coming in, but there was another dynamic in-play. A new-fangled idea like a rail trail at first would be laughed at, but when it started to look real, well that's when the opposition started. Ferocious opposition. This was my first encounter with the concept of the 3 stages of truth.

Shortly after that vote, I was contacted by some folks in Belchertown to help them build a "Friends of the Rail Trail." A friends group made up of local neighbors to help their friends and neighbors understand what the trail was. What it would mean for the town, etc. We built a friends group that went from zero members to over 800 members in a few months. This was the fastest build-out of a Friends group in the US. But in the end, that too was voted down. Albeit by a very slim majority.

Then in 1998, I was hired by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a national, non-profit organization providing guidance on how to develop these linear parks. I worked for them for several years in the policy realm and building "Friends" groups throughout the northeast. When they scaled out of the region, I left and became a Realtor—specializing in the sale of houses near to these special places.

That was the main issue you know. All the antis I met over the years were fearful that they'd never be able to sell their house if that trail was built near their houses. So when I became a Realtor, that became my niche practice. Selling houses near trails. I have a very successful practice, thank you, but more importantly I do inspirational work in the community. Because over the past 15 years, I've also set out to resurrect all the trail projects in places that voted down the idea.

As I mentioned, in 1996, Southampton voted the idea down. Ten years later in 2006, we went back-in and built the Friends of Southampton Greenway. And in 2010 after four years of monthly meetings that included speakers from all over the northeast—every month, drip, drip, drip, the town voted to move the project forward and they then began negotiations with the railroad to purchase the corridor.

In the fall of 2021, the Mass legislature had to give a special greenlight to allow Southampton and a couple of other places to use CPA dollars to buy railbanked corridor. At the December 2021 town meeting, the town voted to do just that, buy the corridor and begin to develop the trail. And at that very moment, Southampton entered the 3rd Stage of Truth. It is now seen as being self-evident. Who could be opposed? And now you know the rest of the story.

Small town charm, BIG picture thinking. . .

In a place where land preservation, smart growth, and sustainable development are the watch words, shouldn't your real estate agent also be a change agent? Someone who has done inspirational things? Shouldn't you be dealing with a Realtor who gets it, and doesn't just talk-the-talk?

Give me a call.

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