

Roads

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Businessmen tell town to fix roads or we'll leave *Lack of Comprehensive Plan road upgrades infuriates North East businessmen*

By Roger Bianchini
Warren County Report

Round 2, I mean Part Two of the Front Royal Planning Commission Public Hearing on recommended changes to the town Comprehensive Development Plan mirrored the initial, adjourned part.

Many of the same players spoke on Sept. 25, as well as several new ones. Among those new speakers were owners of a number of Shenandoah Shores area and Happy Creek Industrial Park businesses. Those businessmen said they feel they have been misled by inconsistencies between stated future plans and the reality presented by the town government.

The bottom line a number of business owners gave the town government was that a continued refusal to listen and work with them on specific road improvements will lead to the loss of both the employment and tax bases their businesses provide to the community.

"Look at it this way, if I don't see

some growth in the future, looking after my best interest [rather than] bringing employment and tax dollars to the community, I'll move my business elsewhere," Air-Pac Industries owner Art Bankey told the town planners. "Because I do not have to stay here. We sell our product all over the world. I could triple my business overnight and triple my employment. But I'm not going to do that until I see some support and an infrastructure that is friendly to a businessman. I ask you to please talk to your business partners because we came here to be a part of this community, not an outside particle as you currently treat us."

Bankey said safety is foremost in his mind. He said he currently brings in 12 to 15 tractor-trailer loads of equipment daily and that the owners and operators of those trucks had expressed serious safety concerns because of sole access along roads referred to as "paved cow trails" to get to the Happy Creek Industrial and Technology Park areas.

Bankey said he brought his busi-

ness to this community nearly 13 years ago – that could be an unlucky 13 for the area should Air-Pac and other employers decide the Town of Front Royal is not acting in good faith on commercial growth and infrastructure issues.

Development dilemma

"At best I am confused, at worst I am losing my mind," Happy Creek property owner David Vazzana told the planners of the conflicting message he believes the town is sending. That conflict Vazzana and others pointed to is between the theory being put forth in the town Comp Plan and the reality of town policies and ordinances.

"I think you have a good Comprehensive Plan and agree with the principals of the amendments

you are suggesting. Unfortunately your land planning rationale is in direct conflict with the stated principals in these amendments," Vazzana said. "The reality of existing ordinances and this roadmap gives me no creative flexibility or options to help the community achieve the goals in your Comprehensive Plan and the stated amendments put forth. It is a very inconsistent message, so landowners will take the path of least resistance – and the path of least resistance is by-right development. That will be a disaster for this town and this community," Vazzana said.

Vazzana, whose family owns the 600-plus acres along Mary' Shady Lane targeted for development by national builder Centex in 2005/06, said he has a by-right plan residential plan for that property that was approved by

the town in 2006.

"Unfortunately that plan will contribute in no way to the vision of your Comprehensive Plan," he said. Vazzana added that his and other similar by-right development plans would "permanently plat over greenways, parks, roads and [scenic] vistas" recommended by the town's Comprehensive Plan. "And you will never get those back. Such by-right development is in direct conflict with every development principal in your Comp Plan," Vazzana said.

As Vazzana attempted to conclude his remarks, Commission Chairman Therese Brown cut him off, telling him he has used up his allotted five minutes of speaking time.

Vazzana glanced at his remain-

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Businessmen (from pg 2)

ing two pages of notes and responded, “With all due respect – you had 18 months and I have five minutes?”

Brown suggested Vazzana and others who reached their allotted time to speak, conclude their remarks after all signed up speakers had had their five minutes of glory – which they did, using one to two minutes of additional time.

Town vision: McMansion-ville?

Former Town Planning Commission Chairman and landscape architect Joe Duggan renewed his harsh criticism of the method and wording of suggested changes.

“Go to page 38 – ‘New Development Proposals’ – what is that, one lot, two lots, 10 lots and who decides? And, ‘Consider environmental resources’ – what are those and what level of expertise is necessary to determine what they are? In a few years you may be gone, council may change. You need to define the parameters you are suggesting; they can’t be left open to interpretation.”

Duggan said in a normal planning environment he would agree

with the town’s chief planning official, Assistant Town Manager for Planning Nimet Soliman, that ordinances are normally brought into compliance with changes to a municipality’s Comprehensive Plan.

“Unfortunately, in this town that is not the case,” Duggan asserted. “When the downzoning was done, the ordinances were rewritten it was all sign, sealed and delivered together ... There is a precedent established in this town to approve the whole package all together and we ask for the same respect,” Duggan said of building professionals.

Duggan noted that the town’s Comprehensive Plan has recommended the building a major north-south connector road, the much-discussed Leach’s Run Parkway, between Happy Creek Road and John Marshall Highway for nearly three decades.

“Your Comp plan says build Leach’s Run Parkway, your slope ordinance says it can’t be done,” Duggan pointed out.

Later a Jamestown Road area resident, Leslie Fiddler, objected to the recent council suggestion small connector roads be used to facilitate access to the new Warren County High School through

existing neighborhoods. Fiddler said existing traffic needs made the time ripe to proceed with construction of Leach’s Run Parkway to protect the integrity of neighborhoods from through traffic.

Duggan also agreed with earlier assertions that by-right development would ultimately destroy what the town says it wants – controlled residential development maximizing the preservation of open and park space and natural views.

“That by-right development will occur on one-acre lots, not 10 – there are economic factors that will determine that,” Duggan said. He pointed to examples to the east where residential sprawl characterized by one-acre “McMansions” have become the norm.

“This is what you are asking for?” Duggan asked.

Town isolationism?

As the evening’s first speaker, Happy Creek landowner David Vazzana also urged the town to work with the other major stake-

holders in the community’s future and to let reason, rather than fear of the future drive its decision-making process.

Referencing the joint community SRI Roadmap to the Future, Vazzana pointed to two potential futures described in that roadmap:

Vision I, a population polarized between long-time, low-paid locals and new residents traveling I-66 east daily to high paying Metro jobs and feeling no ties to the community they have moved into; open space lost and taxes climbing to cover necessary infrastructure improvements;

Vision II, a model community attracting new and higher paying industry and jobs to the area, a cross section of old and new residents able to work in the community in which they live and reflecting a sense of community.

“I would suggest you ask the EDA how they feel about these amendments; I suggest you ask the county how they feel about these amendments,” Vazzana said of two of the three stakeholders (the Chamber of Commerce representing the business commu-

nity is the third) in the SRI Roadmap to the Future.

The town opted out of further participation in the SRI Roadmap to the Future earlier this year, declining a \$14,000 financial commitment to year one of the implementation phase of developing a coordinated community effort to plan its future development over the next 20 years.

County weighs in

Sought or not, the Town of Front Royal received input from county staff on its proposed Comprehensive Development Plan

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Forget About It

By Caprice Crane
(Warner Books, \$13.99)

Reviewed by Cindy Elavsky

Caprice Crane’s latest book, “Forget About It,” is everything a good chick-lit book should be: smart, funny, entertaining and a touch bittersweet. Crane’s keen outer ear for dialogue and inner ear for what women are really thinking lends to the believability and likeability of her main character, Jordan Landau.

The story opens with our heroine trying to make her way through a life that just seems to happen to her. Jordan is in a job she can’t seem to advance in, with a bad boyfriend she can’t seem to break up with, and she takes crap from a family who can’t seem to appreciate her. However, as is Jordan’s nature, she just accepts it — as she’s been conditioned to do her entire life.

Then, a freak accident changes everything. As she is lying in a hospital bed waking from unconsciousness after she gets hit while riding her bike, she has an idea. She is going to rewrite her life by faking amnesia. Things the old Jordan would let slide, the new Jordan won’t tolerate. She can chalk up her weird behavior to her head injury, and, in the process, gain control of her life.

As new Jordan wows her boss, confuses her boyfriend and woos a new man, other circumstances are set into motion that could derail her entire plan.

“Forget About It” is a fast, fun read. While not entirely plausible, the book does what it should — offer a wonderful escape from everyday life. And isn’t that what a good book should do? Plus, since the writing is so smart and witty, you don’t feel like you’re getting too much junk food in your diet. So relax, and enjoy!

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Dollars and sense

by David Uffington

When Adjustable Mortgages Reset

Subprime: When a lender loans money for a mortgage under less than ideal circumstances.

Two years ago, in a lending frenzy, buyers with less-than-perfect credit were given subprime adjustable mortgages with extremely low teaser interest rates, typically for a period of two years. Because the housing market was going strong a few years ago (the economic bubble), buyers assumed that values would continue to rise and that at the end of the low-interest period, they would be able to refinance when the interest rate adjusted.

Now, just when those interest rates are resetting, many of those homeowners are finding that they’re unable to refinance. Perhaps their personal credit situations are no longer in good shape (or never were to begin with). Perhaps they’re out of work. Or, more often than not, home values have fallen and the house can’t be sold for what’s still owed on the note.

With the increased interest coming due, many of those formerly hopeful buyers are going to be forced to make much larger mortgage payments. Many can’t afford the extra hundreds

of dollars per month.

Delinquencies are already soaring, and the peak for this is likely to be in October. It’s thought that the interest rates of \$50 billion in mortgages are going to reset.

This can create a vicious cycle. With so many homeowners defaulting, lenders have tightened up on how and when they loan money, leaving homeowners unable to refinance their loans. When buyers default and lose their homes to foreclosure, it leaves vacant dwellings in a neighborhood. This in turn affects the selling prices of other homes in the area, many of which have likely been on the market for a long time already.

Enter the scammers. For a big upfront fee, they promise to deal with the mortgage company for the homeowner. Unfortunately, all too often homeowners are discovering that the scammers just take the money and run. Meanwhile the mortgage company moves ahead with foreclosure plans because the homeowner doesn’t contact them.

If you’re caught in this situation and know you can’t make the increased payments when your interest rate goes up, contact your lender. Depending on your payment history, it might be able to help. A scammer certainly won’t.

David Uffington regrets that he cannot personally answer reader questions, but will incorporate them into his column whenever possible. Write to him in care of King Features Weekly Service, P.O. Box 536475, Orlando, FL 32853-6475, or send e-mail to columnreply@gmail.com.

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