

## Opinion



# More Rezoning Speak

## GreenReport

By Al Green



After the last report on the rezoning issue, I received a thoughtful reply from one of the most influential members of the Planning and Zoning Board.

He took exception to my description of the commercially zoned properties as worthless. Any constant reader of this column knows that I have, upon occasion, resorted to hyperbole to make my point. Obviously no property not under water on Longboat Key is actually worthless. Also, since no one can predict if the property will always remain commercially zoned, future values are always a guess.

However, he went on to criticize my suggestion on how to put the referendum issue on the back burner. He assumed that what I was suggesting was simply an attempt to eliminate commercial activity on the Key. Nothing could be further from the truth. I have been advocating for 15 years that we must direct our efforts to making whatever commercial venture we need be profitable enough so that the owners of the land would invest their capital to take down the current eyesores and replace them with up-to-date malls that would entice people to shop and eat locally.

I spent my business career involved in marketing high-end clothing and, as a result, have traveled the country extensively. It didn't take a master's degree to see how the correlation between the ambience of an upscale retail environment and the ability to sell quality products was related. For example, I was able to do over 50% of all the business I did in Missouri in one place, Country Club Plaza, Kansas City. Anyone acquainted with that part of the country knows the charm of this intelligently developed and administered shopping plaza. Closer to home, next time you are on the East Coast, drop in on Mizener Place, an Arvida development in a previously low rent area of Boca Raton. These are both examples of what can be done with good design to create a destination facility.

What my correspondent failed to grasp is that despite every hint of easy acceptance of any good design, no one has stepped forward. This is the reality. In addition, any

change in the current status, even if it just involved allowing undeveloped properties to be rezoned would require a referendum. This is assuming such a procedure wasn't considered spot zoning.

Consequently, we are faced with a dilemma. If we do nothing, we will continue to see the current commercial stock fall upon the heads of the tenants. We are already seeing air conditioning that doesn't perform, leaks that can't be fixed and businesses go under because of poor visibility and unattractive sites. Rental rates have fallen about 40% in the past 10 years. At the same time taxes continue to go up.

My correspondent seems to feel we can correct our defects with changes in the zoning and building codes that will not involve using the referendum. It seems that every new board member or new commissioner assumes that no one with any brains has been there before. The previous Planning and Zoning Board not only met almost weekly with the current merchants and the chamber but also asked specifically for a list of code changes that they would want to see. We not only have made most of those changes but we have lowered the requirement for

a planned urban development in a commercial area from 10 acres to two acres. Since planned urban development status allows the applicant free range to present any plan they wish, it should encourage any property owner who felt constrained by our codes to go this route. We all know that this change did not make any difference. Longboat Key commercial rentals would have to bring at least five times the current footage rental, (assuming there is no residential component) to make any investment in new construction worthwhile.

These are the facts. With the exception of the Centre Shop, there is not a well-designed area on the Key (and that one isn't going to make it to Architectural Digest). The layout of the Publix center is a disgrace. I think we can all agree that part of the blame rests on poor or just mediocre business operations but this is beyond the scope of our public officials. All we can do is create a climate that will entice someone to step in and create something exciting that will bring in good merchants and needed services. This will not happen if the issue of a referendum remains on the table. I certainly hope my correspondent will agree or if not, at least become less influential.

The memorial service for Downs Spittler, the former Rector of All Angels was held June 29 with not one empty seat or one dry eye. All through the service, I couldn't help but reflect that in this time of religious turmoil with ayatollahs, priests, ministers and rabbis competing to announce their exclusive right of passage to a better tomorrow, we were mourning a man who would have none of it. The idea that anyone or any religion had a monopoly on God's grace would have been anathema to this truly godly person. If any of the mourners in attendance will bring away from their relationship with Reverend Spittler, the belief in the spirit of mutual love that governed his life, Downs Spittler will never die. As Leigh Hunt wrote in his wonderful poem of Abou Ben Adem who asked that he be written as one who loves his fellow man.

"And show'd the names whom love of god had blest,  
And lo! Ben Adem's name led all the rest."

# As Time Goes By

Richard L. Hershatter  
Contributing Writer

**You must remember this,  
There is no bit or miss,  
No pie up in the sky;  
The fundamental things apply  
As time goes by.**

**It's still the same old story;  
No point to fret or worry,  
A sigh is just a sigh;  
The world will always welcome dreamers  
As time goes by.**

(apologies to H. Hupfeld and Casablanca)

We are told that it's a sign of advancing age, when a person starts to resent change and dreams of things the way they used to be.

Longboat Key is changing, in ways great and small. Some of it is inevitable, a natural progression dictated by economics and the principles of free enterprise.

Nonetheless, there is a sadness about it all, and one can only wish that the paradise of yesterday will remain, in its own way, as lovely as it has always been.

Many were shocked last year to learn that the beachfront property on which the Holiday Inn was located had been purchased by developers and the building was to be razed to make way for high rise condominiums.

The building was relatively new, and tearing it down seemed, on first blush, to be extravagantly wasteful. As plans progressed, however, it became obvious that the highest and best use of the premises from an economic standpoint was the substitution of luxury dwelling units for the former transient accommodations for tourists.

In rapid succession, other motel-type structures have been acquired by developers and are being converted to individual dwellings for sale to people who want to live here.

Because of the scarcity of available vacant land, inno-

vative contractors have even purchased stately homes, then leveled them in order to make room for expensive multiple structures.

Concerns have been raised about what such changes mean to the balance between commercial tourism and the primary residential character of the Key, with some old-timers questioning how future residents are going to find the place, if they cannot first visit as tourists.

Such fears seem to have been baseless, however. Thanks to our well-conceived planning and zoning regulations, there is no real threat to density, and the law of supply and demand appears to be working to maintain a healthy economic equilibrium.

Like the principle enunciated in an old Kevin Costner movie, *Field of Dreams*: "If you

build it, they will come."

There are some aspects to the transitions taking place, however, which are regrettable as they relate to the quality of life on Longboat, at least in the short term.

Announcement was made recently that Steve and Maureen Horn, owners of Maureen's Palm Grille for the last seven years, sold the restaurant in favor of pursuing other interests.

A new restaurateur will be coming in, but Steve Horn served up the best bouillabaisse this side of Marseilles, and for those who are not aficionados of fish stew, the variety of exotic martinis that were a hallmark of the place will certainly be missed.

The establishment was a gem, and there are some, including this writer, who would have welcomed the placement of a historic "do-not-change" plaque on the front entrance.

After their years of hard work in the world of food service, however, the Horns have earned the right to pursue

other, less demanding, fields of endeavor. We wish them well, but their departure leaves a void that will be difficult, if not impossible, to fill.

Time, as they say, marches on, and nothing ever remains the same.

Closer to home, as far as this newspaper is concerned, is the departure of Rebecca Blue for greener pastures.

Under the tutelage of Editor and Publisher Steve Reid, Rebecca had honed her craft as Staff Writer, covering all aspects of Town affairs, meeting and interviewing virtually every official involved with Longboat Key.

Her "Reacting to Rebecca" column was a popular feature that opened a window to the thoughts and motivations of the Town's movers and shakers, as well as those of ordinary citizens, and she recently earned a well-deserved promotion to News Editor.

As so often happens, her talents and enthusiasm caught the attention of others in the business, and she has accepted a position with a daily newspaper, The Bradenton Herald, covering events closer to her home in that town.

Longboaters will miss her, but along with her colleagues on the Longboat Key News, will wish her well.

As we said at the outset, change is not always welcome, even though it is a normal part of the human condition. As to the future, we can only remember the words of Doris Day's famous lament:

**"Que sera, sera,  
Whatever will be, will be;  
The future's not ours to see.  
Que Sera, sera,  
What will be, will be."**

Richard L. Hershatter is a retired Connecticut lawyer and novelist who writes a regular column in each issue of the Longboat Key News. He can be reached at [Banyan502@AOL.com](mailto:Banyan502@AOL.com).

