

Dispersing, from Page 3A

tronically and in the office and at home.

Now, clients have to come to the court house to access a limited amount of court records, which creates a hardship and increased work load for everyone.

It was the Committee on Privacy and Court Records that was created to find a solution to the problem.

It is chaired by Professor Jon Mills of Gainesville and committee members, who have been selected state-wide. Walt Smith of Sarasota, who is the 12th Judicial Circuit administrator in Manatee County, applauds Shore's efforts to fashion a reasonable attempt to manage the files and to provide a solution to the difficult balancing act set before the committee.

In fact, Smith did not think that it would be possible to release information to the public without damaging the private sector.

"I came down on the dissenting side of the committee. It's very difficult to keep records private," Smith said. "Mr. Shore's proposal is reasonable."

Twenty-four recommendations were submitted by the committee to the Supreme Court in August 2005.

Three public hearings were scheduled on March 1, April 19, and June 14, 2006.

Their policy outlined that a solution must achieve a balance between two vital principles: openness and transparency in court records, while maintaining individual privacy.

A misuse could result in identity theft and misuse of personal information, the committee determined.

Their mission is only part of a two-year plan put forth by the state Supreme Court. Other initiatives include advances in electronic filing, integrated information systems, automated forms and Web-based information communication.

The pilot program run by Shore will be steered by the Florida Courts Technology Commission and the Office of the State Court Administrator, or OSCA, as it is affectionately known.

Youngs says that all the players would come together by Nov. 1 to give guidelines to them, though they have already submitted their pilot proposal and are waiting to see what the commission says.

Who will be the test group in Manatee County?

Youngs says that they will ask regular clients to help out. And of course the press would be good candidates, he says.

KeyOpinion

The Sinking Survey

The Town Visioning Survey is like a diseased patient who showed up at Monday night's Commission meeting and no one could cure. Watching the Commissioners was like watching doctors on the verge of throwing up their hands.

It was Planning and Zoning Board Chairman Sandy Gilbert who kept the survey dream alive. And to push the metaphor, the problems with the Town survey are like lesions that keep spreading. To name a few:

- The whole Vision Plan survey is supposedly based on the reactions, thoughts and feelings of resident focus sessions that were held last spring. Unfortunately, many of the same residents came to each session, as noted by Mayor Joan Webster. Also, the very idea that people who show up at focus groups meetings are representative of the community as a whole is unsound. Only the politically active, the extra energetic and caring citizens, the bored and those with an ax to grind generally show up. Obviously the majority of Longboaters had something else to do. That alone taints the results.

- Then there are the questions. The consultant is distilling the questions. Fine enough, since he is the outsider — the objective hired hand. But it is the next step that is troublesome. The planning and zoning board spent hours last Friday tweaking and changing the survey questions with the help of Commissioner George Spoll who sat in the audience with a director's baton.

That is problematic. The planning board is inherently charged with planning. The members have a vested interest in the process, and opinions abound. Some of the members want to see the density restriction on

Longboat Key lifted to allow flexible commercial zoning and other tourism districts. Even ideas such as abandoning height restrictions are being bandied about.

By Steve Reid
Editor & Publisher



Also, Commissioner Spoll should not have sat in on the planning board meeting. It puts undue pressure and intimidation on board mem-

bers who later have to pass the questionnaire onto the Commission where Spoll will vote and have a chance to modify what he has been busy shaping from the audience seat.

- The cost. The survey is costing \$60,000 plus, but its value is questionable. You can ask in a survey, "Should we lower taxes? Should traffic be reduced? Should we use renewable sources of water?" and you get easy and simple and predictable reactions. What is difficult is to be a commissioner and hear all the conflicting realities and make a decision and stand by that decision.

Are we entering an era where all decision-making is to be suspended until one can point to survey results and say, "This is what you wanted!"

I commend the commissioners who question the validity and integrity of the survey. The tough problems on the Key — The Islander groins, dwindling tourism, beach renourishment costs, tackling the budget — are what our leaders are charged to resolve. And right or wrong they have made decisions over the years.

One constant is that the consultants employed by the Town in both the T-head groin plan and in the visioning survey are in the best position of all — they capitalize on our conflicts. It should be self evident that if we cannot agree on the questions of a survey and have fundamental doubts as to the meaning of the process, than the results will be all the more debatable and unreliable.

It would be helpful if commissioners moved their attention to tackling problems and making tough decisions. We need our leaders to do what they think is right and just and financially responsible — not to hire survey teams and fashion policy out of opinion polls.

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LongboatLetters

Hooray for Turtle Pamphlet

Dear Editor:

A big thank you goes to our Longboat Key Public Works Department and to Florida Power and Light for sending Longboat Key residents the excellent pamphlet on "Sea Turtles and Lights." All of our Longboat Key Turtle Watchers, including those at Mote Laboratory, are very grateful for the timely dissemination of this valuable information. Mailing it along with our water bills surely got everyone's attention, so we thank you for this extra help toward saving these historic, ancient and endangered animals.

And, while you're at it, please move those beach chairs out of the way so that our turtles, both big and small, will not get entangled, dehydrated and die!

Virginia Sanders
Longboat Key Turtle Watch

Is Secular Democracy the Cause of All Problems?

Dear Editor:

I watched Bill Moyers interview Salmon Rushdie on PBS last night. I felt that Rushdie was articulating a seemingly global truism when he noted that the universal religious resurgence in the last 20 years has created a situation where religion, in one form or another, is at the center of most every human beings life. We are all either believers or feel threatened by the believers. Rushdie went on to say that he believed the root cause for what was unimaginable 30 years ago, the earth in peril as a result of religious differences, was the failure of secular democracy to improve the lives of most of humanity. I think I agree.

Certainly in this country, religion is a fundamental factor in the incredible polarization we are witnessing. We are a society paralyzed by religion. Ask yourself if you feel freer than you did five years ago, before the religious wars finally engulfed this country.

How do you react to the following definition: "A governmental system led by a dictator having complete power, forcibly suppressing opposition and criticism, regimenting all industry, commerce, etc., and emphasizing an aggressive nationalism and often racism."

America is polarized around this definition. The one element missing from the above definition is the inclusion of a fundamentalist religious component, which was not previously a part of the definition of fascism. Now we have religious fascism, radical religious regimes and religious-based wars.

Are you apprehensive about the future of America, because you believe that some radical religious group will ignite atomic weapons in our cities, causing a massive collapse of our way of life? I am.

What about the failings of secular democracy to lift the earth's masses out of poverty?

What about overpopulation? No one talks about too many people — maybe it's not religiously correct. I know of no religion that is advocating the decrease of the world's population, such as is happening in China. But, then the Chinese are godless, aren't they?

Who would have thought that religion would be so important and pressing in this day and age 30 years ago?

Will the poor inherit the earth?

Do you honestly believe we can win Bush's crusade? The day of reckoning may be at hand.

Marx said, "Capitalism produces its own gravediggers."

What is to be done about the seeming failure we call secular democracy?

Gene Jaleski
Longboat Key