

KeyOpinion

Vision, or Nightmare?

Richard L. Hershatter
Contributing Columnist

*If a proposal is defective
In a dozen different ways,
The Commission's most effective
And deserves the public's praise
When its questions are objective
And postponed to future days.*

It started reasonably enough, and with the best of intentions.

Mandated by law to produce a comprehensive plan, which would provide Longboat Key's framework for growth through the next several decades, the Town Commission appropriated the sum of \$60,000 to hire experts to assist in a so-called "visioning process."

Following interviews with a number of firms, the town settled on Arrington-Marlowe, LLC, an experienced consulting company, to study Longboat's history and present situation.

There followed an intense series of meetings between the consultant and various groups of townspeople. In almost a game-playing fashion, attendees were invited to form small discussion or focus groups where relevant topics were batted back and forth, enabling the consultant to categorize and distill the issues of greatest concern to the participants.

Although sessions were well advertised and open to the public, there was some concern that there ought to be a wider input from the community, so the consultant, with assistance from members of the Planning & Zoning Commission, drafted a series of questions for a proposed survey to be mailed to all residents.

Sounds like a good idea, but as so often happens, the devil was in the details, and presentation of the draft to the Town Commission at its meeting on July 10th produced a storm of criticism.

For example, many of the proposed questions were "yesterday's steak," in that they concerned issues that had already been put to public vote and rejected.

Historically, the position of Town Commissioner is unpaid and voluntary. Commissioners serve out of a sense of civic-mindedness, and there has never been any dearth of able, qualified citizens willing to stand for election. A previous effort to pay them was soundly defeated at referendum.

Similarly, the question of appropriating public funds for the construction of a new community center was turned down by the voters. Polling the public anew on the issue would seem to be an attempt to take another bite out of the apple.

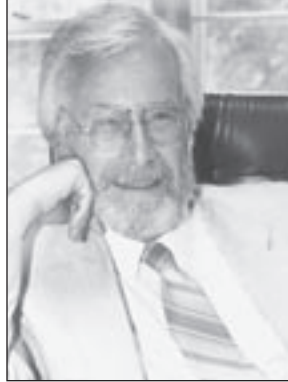
Even the issue of "mixed use zoning," to allow residential units atop commercial buildings, has been presented to the electorate and turned down. Addressing the problem again so soon is not only redundant, but it raises the suspicion that someone may be scheming to do an end run around the public's wishes.

Some of the proposed questions, although of legitimate concern, are phrased in a manner that can only be described as fatuous.

For example, asking whether public funds should be devoted to fighting red tide is like questioning whether one is in favor of apple pie. The answer is not only self-evident, but it is the sort of problem that elected leaders are expected to decide.

Similarly, the problem of adequate water for drinking and irrigation purposes has weighed heavily on town officials, and the previous plan to institute the use of reclaimed water was put before the voters and approved. It ultimately died because of the failure of Sarasota officials to cooperate.

The need still exists, but it is up to the town to develop a new plan for consideration of the voters. Taking a poll without specific details on which to base an informed



judgment is a useless exercise.

To their credit, the Mayor, Vice-mayor, and most of the commissioners voiced objections to the form and content of the draft survey questions.

By consensus, it was decided to put the entire matter over to their first work session in September, at which time the threshold issue to be decided is whether it makes any sense to expend an additional \$30,000 on doing a mail survey at all.

What is already coming through loud and clear is that citizens pretty much like Longboat Key just the way it is.

People understand that there are problems affecting the viability of business and the loss of tourism, but those are essentially being caused by property tax inequities and the determination by the marketplace that scarce land is more valuable for residential than for commercial purposes.

That's the free enterprise system, and no amount of "visioning" is going to change that. Nor should it.

Like good generals, the function of elected leaders is to lead; not to wait to see which way the troops are going and then rush to get ahead of them.

The consultant should prepare a proposed comprehensive plan based on the information already gathered, run it by the Planning and Zoning Commission, and then present to the Commission for action.

*When the time arrives to take a path selected,
After lesser choices all have been rejected,
Take the vision that the experts have perfected,
And leave the rest to those we have elected.*

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Around the World in 800 Words — More or Less

Tom Burgum
Contributing Columnist

Isreal and Hezbollah

According to reports in Reuters, Israel broke the truce agreement by attacking a concentration of Hezbollah fighters. Most European nations immediately condemned this Jewish outrage. Most, however, also ignored the reason. Members of Hezbollah were busy supplying one of their bases, which is in itself a violation. Since there are not yet any U.N. peacekeepers or Lebanese regulars in place, Israeli forces took matters in their own hands. Still, it is the Israelis who are censored for breaking the truce agreement. This is certainly in keeping with the general coverage of the Israeli — Hezbollah conflict.

Do you remember the picture of the weeping Lebanese woman who stood in front of a ruined house, pointing and blubbering about Israel and the United States? It was a heart-wrenching picture, one that damned Israel and the United States. Or, do you remember the weeping Lebanese woman who stood in front of a ruined apartment, or a ruined business place? It was, of course, the same woman and she was shipped from place to place, reenacting her pathos for compliant Western newsmen. It also turned out she owned none of the properties. I was relieved when informed of this. She would have been the unluckiest property owner of all time had it been true. As it was, she is now eligible for "Best Supporting Actress." A happy ending.

Sweden Fights Back

It was recently announced that Muslims in Sweden demanded that Sweden introduce separate laws for Muslims. The proposals include allowing imams into state (public) schools to give Muslim children separate lessons in Islam and their parents' native languages. The letter also said that boys and girls should have separate swimming lessons and that divorces between Muslims should be approved by an imam. The Minister for Equality and Integration (I'm not kidding), one Jens

Orback fired back: "We will not have separate laws in Sweden. In Sweden, we are all equal before the law. In Sweden, we have fought for a long time to achieve gender-neutral laws, and to propose that certain groups should not be treated like others is completely unacceptable."

Good for Jens, but he owed us one as earlier in his career he had addressed the Muslim problem by saying, "We must be open and tolerant towards Islam and the Muslims because when we are in the minority they will be like that towards us."

Damn, even the French and the Looney Left don't surrender before the war begins. Maybe Jens is unaware that Christianity is the religion of the moment in the third world. In fact, by the year 2050, three billion Christians will inhabit the globe, continuing to outnumber Muslims by at least three to two. This will likely continue because the Third World Christians still believe in having more than one child. So relax Jens, don't surrender yet, we've got the numbers on them for a while and the Third World group still sings "Onward Christian Soldiers." But to be fair to Muslims, Christians are not wholly without things to apologize for. They have to accept some responsibility for inflicting the world with the likes of Pat Robertson, Bishop Spong, and Jimmy Carter.

Jimmy Carter Bleats Again

Jimmy Carter felt it necessary to inform a world, a world no doubt breathless with anticipation, that he (St. James) did not believe Israel was justified in bombing all of Lebanon just because Hezbollah had kidnapped two soldiers — St. James just didn't believe it was proportional. As usual, this miserable stump of a would be



fundamentalist preacher got it wrong. Hezbollah had been firing an occasional rocket into Israel for some months. Hezbollah fighters had invaded Israeli territory many times; the last one was remarkable only because it was successful. Carter was also worried about the 28 dead civilians in one Lebanese village. He either didn't know, or didn't reveal, that over 150 Katyusha rockets had been launched from the village.

When Carter left the White House, interest rates were at 21%. American diplomats in Iran had been held for 444 days, and America had been neutered by his indecision. Even with this sorry record to rest on, Carter just won't shut up. Can you name one instance since his defeat in 1980 when he has praised the policies of a sitting president of this country? No, you can't. Remember when he went to North Korea on his own to negotiate an end to their nuclear ambitions? They told St. James they would be good if we sent them food and oil. President Clinton was now in a box and forced to go along with the Carter charade. That worked didn't it? North Korea took the food and oil and keeps developing a nuclear weapon. It was no accident that the program for the Democratic Convention in 1996 listed Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy and Clinton as the Great Democratic Presidents, pointedly ignoring Jimmy Carter.

H.L. Mencken once observed, "Defeated candidates for the Presidency should be quietly hung as a matter of public sanitation."

Carter's performance since Nov. 1980 certainly validates Mencken's position.

What is Wrong with the News Media?

The forces of good (Detroit Tigers) had just finished defeating the forces of evil (Chicago White Sox) 7 to 2 last Tuesday and I went to MSNBC looking for news. No luck there, as the story was about John Mark Karr who had recently confessed to the 10-year-old murder of JonBenet Ramsey. Not caring one wit about the story,

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