

Loudoun Now



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Loudoun Community Media

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Opinion

Life in Mayberry

Three months into the term of the new Purcellville Town Council, the choices posed in the “Mayberry not Metropolis” theme of last fall’s campaign are becoming clear. The choices may not be what voters thought they would be.

Based on the actions of the council’s four-member majority so far, championing a Mayberry vision for the town is not just about stopping development. It appears to be a return to back-room deals, petty political fiefdoms, and bureaucratic bumbling. It is not small-town government at its best.

While town residents may welcome a budget that lowers the tax rate and forgoes needed utility rate increases, they easily should recognize the fiscal foolhardiness of unprecedented across-the-board spending deficits. And then there is the conflict-infused jockeying for the town’s top management posts.

In Mayberry, it appears that foundational government principles such as fiscal stewardship and transparency

aren’t as important as long as you have four votes.

By contrast, we must assume that Metropolis is something other than visions of skyscrapers and unchecked development.

It might be a place where the town government functions with civility and openness and where the recommendations of experienced advisors are valued. The Metropolis’ mission-critical water and sewer systems are probably adequately funded with investments made as needed to address known potential points of failure. The business community likely is viewed as a partner in improving the quality of life for the townspeople. The Police Department is probably recognized for the responsiveness of its service, not for a command power struggle being played out with Barney Fife-like ineptitude.

One thing about the campaign is proving to be true—the difference between living in Mayberry and living in Metropolis is quite stark.

LETTERS to the Editor

The Spirit

Editor:

I am writing regarding the article on the creation of the “Guide to Loudoun in the American Revolution” by Rich Gillespie. As we prepare to celebrate our 250th anniversary as a nation, I was thrilled to see our statue “Spirit of Loudoun” on the cover.

The founding officers of this committee were members of the Sons of the American Revolution and the Daughters of the American Revolution (Ketoctin Chapter). We had several meetings, but the first where minutes were kept was held Jan. 13, 2003. I was honored to be the secretary who kept the minutes from that day until our dedication. At that meeting, we chose our official name: Loudoun Revolutionary War Memorial Committee.

During those 12 years, many obstacles were overcome. Proposals were sent out. Several maquettes were submitted for the people of Loudoun to vote on. From the beginning, we wanted this to be a community project.

Finally, on Nov. 11, 2015, “The Spirit of Loudoun” was dedicated.

You can read the whole story and history in a wonderful article in *Loudoun Now* by Margaret Morton from Nov. 12, 2015.

— Gail Ann Adams, Leesburg

Wellbeing or Wealth?

Editor:

Bill Sutherland’s recent letter concerning Ms. DeSaix’s views on the Trump administration showed passion but no telling facts. He had high praise for the incumbent’s attack against fraud, waste, and abuse, but was short on data.

The federal government’s budget for 2024 was \$6.75 trillion, and projected to be \$7.75 trillion for 2025. The Government Accountability Office estimates that fraud, waste, and abuse range between three and seven percent. These issues require attention and resolution. It is not beneficial to indiscriminately “chainsaw” government services. Policy makers should pinpoint their actions.

The current approach shows no planning, no thought to unintended consequences, no thinking of economic impact, and no concern for people—30% of federal workers are veterans. Seventeen thousand federal workers live in Loudoun County. They pay taxes, buy real estate, and consume goods from our merchants. The wholesale firings will reduce levels of service to veterans and recipients of Social Security and other programs, as well as significant reductions in income

tax collections.

According to the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, private industries/organizations lose five percent of their annual revenue to fraud. The U.S. insurance industry estimates that 10% of property/casualty claims and 20% of health claims involve fraud.

Mr. Sutherland maintained that the current administration made strides in economic growth and job creation. Two major metrics for economic health are consumer confidence and the U.S. stock markets. The Conference Board’s Consumer Confidence Index fell to 92.9 in March. Consumer confidence has not been that low for 10 years. The Expectations Index, which reflects short-term outlook for income, business, and labor market conditions dropped to 65.2, well below the threshold of 80 that signals a potential recession. The Dow Jones Industrial Average declined 3.6% since Trump’s inauguration. The S&P 500 index, which tracks the 500 largest publicly traded companies, declined 4% since January 20th. The Nasdaq Composite losses exceed 10%.

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Opinion

One Element

It was 2022 when the Dominion Energy first surprised Data Center Alley developers with the warning that providing power to new projects could be delayed by years.

That challenge has only grown.

The power generation shortage is prompting a rollback of plans to phase out inefficient plants that are most harmful to the climate. Planning for new transmission corridors is spurring community outrage and lawsuits. Promising technologies for on-site power generation remain years or decades from practical application. Regulatory leadership at the federal and state levels has been lacking.

That is the context in which our Board of Supervisors is launching a planning effort focused on the county's electrical infrastructure. The Comprehensive Plan amendment that will evolve over the next year is focused on one element of the challenge: where to place the lines that will carry the flow of free electrons from far-off power sources to the computer chips needed to stream our

TikTok clips and power artificial intelligence platforms.

That planning exercise is needed. Just as with the design of roads and the placement of schools, local leaders must have confidence that the infrastructure will be in place to serve the developments they approve.

But that must be part of a larger deliberation that includes those providing the power and the data center developers generating the massive increase in demand. Amid the continuing land rush to secure approvals for future data centers, county leaders should, somehow, have a solid understanding of what is actually feasible to build and operate.

It is true that the county's already overflowing tax coffers benefit from this rampant land speculation, but there are costs as well, not the least of which is the loss of affordable land available for other businesses and housing.

Proper planning of power lines is important and overdue, but it is just one element in the effort to maintain our community balance.

LETTERS *to the Editor*

Enough

Editor:

We've lived in bucolic Loudoun nearly 25 years. Forty-seven years prior, it was Falls Church and Fairfax. As the county grew, we embraced new ideas while protecting our values that made our county so welcoming and successful.

However, there came a time where we grew too fast for our infrastructure. Some folks didn't see the need for farmland and pushed our dairy production down or out of business.

The data centers came in which brought more tax revenue than our county has ever seen and more newcomers who didn't understand our heritage plus others on a mission of destruction.

They form organized pockets spewing hate speech and worse against our neighbors. I've lived through this before but at different levels and times: bullies against my Black classmates, against mentally and physically different children and adults, and now incredulously against a religious group because of their views or genetic makeup. Oh, except they don't stop there.

It's death to America. I might not

be Jewish but I'm American. Don't you think we should view this language as threatening as opposed to freedom of speech?

Thank you Gary L. Katz for raising your voice in the June 6 letter, Enough is Enough. It's time we all say enough is enough. This hate and vitriol is not coming from Loudoun County-born and raised individuals expressing unique thoughts. It's a cancer in our midst rising from ill-intentioned sources.

We have many productive ways to effect change with and without legislation and always without resorting to hate speech and violence. End the bully pulpit now. No longer can we tolerate Loudoun County Board of Supervisors encouragement or support of any form of antisemitic hate speech and activism. In fact, it's time they call for an end to it and support the culture of Loudoun County's celebrated history.

We must all pay attention to who is leading our county. They work for us regardless of whether you voted for that person or not. Our home, our county, is only as happy as we make it.

— Nancy Sander, Leesburg

Revitalization?

Editor:

Those who use political buzz words and those who are listening may have widely different interpretations of what the words actually mean.

Take the word "revitalization."

As one of many who hopes Purcellville will maintain its charming small-town character, I was taken aback when the mayor objected to the proposed goal statement for the town's Planning Commission to promote "historic preservation, pedestrian accessibility, and design standards that support downtown revitalization."

On the surface, this sounds like something he and other preservationists would enthusiastically endorse. Why would he take issue with it?

My guess is that the objection reflects a fear that the word "revitalization" might be exploited by development interests to justify large-scale residential or commercial developments that could fundamentally change the town's character

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Opinion

Better Stewards

Too much money. It's a problem that few other governments on the planet are facing.

In preparation for the fiscal year 2027 Loudoun budget, the county's finance managers again are waving the warning flags about the growing imbalance in revenue sources. Money from data centers make up a disproportionately large share of the tax stream and that disparity is expected to continue to grow.

And it will grow even faster if county leaders follow the seemingly logical path of further reducing taxes paid by homeowners and other residents.

The proposal to lower data center taxes is a tough sell.

But so should be the blank-check approach to running the government and the school system. It is not growing tax revenues that should be viewed as unsustainable, but the ballooning staffing costs and programmatic expansions. This month, the county will open a \$100 million recreation center staffed by more than 60 full time equivalent positions, with another center in the planning stages. And it launched a free, on-demand, Uber-like transportation service in the Leesburg area after already waiving fares on other local bus routes.

There are ways to balance the revenue without pursuing the problematic course of spending it or reducing it. The staff and board already have taken some of those steps, by

building larger rainy day reserve funds and putting more cash into construction projects.

Certainly, more cash could be funneled to capital projects. Could the county achieve both record high commercial tax revenues and record-low debt—ultimately lowering taxes for future residents? That doesn't seem like a goal; the board voted this week to raise its debt ceiling policies to allow more borrowing.

Should the county government continue to earmark allocations of real estate tax revenues to cover the state government's shortfalls in meeting its transportation responsibilities? What if "excess" data center revenue was used to fill that gap instead? New roads don't come with permanent staffing or program requirements that will increase future budgets.

And another share of the real estate tax collections is reserved for affordable housing initiatives. That, too, could be a candidate for use of the data center windfall—resulting in long-term community assets without ballooning future budgets.

The first question is whether data centers or residents are overtaxed. Once answered, the next question is: How can we be the best stewards of the revenues fairly collected? We can do that better.

LETTERS to the Editor

Appalling

Editor:

I appreciated your reprinting of "Missed Opportunities" from Jan. 27, 2022. It is beyond ludicrous that we find ourselves in this situation yet again.

I find it appalling that there is still no one in local government (town or county) that will partner with the mobile home residents to address their plight. I find myself in agreement with Mr. Gregory in doubting the commitment of local leaders to find solutions to affordable housing concerns.

There used to be, in England, a provision for the retired and elderly who could not find housing within their means called "council flats." These were apartments owned by the Town Council that were allotted to qualified individuals,

something akin to public housing. It seems to me that with the enormous influx of tax revenue in recent years, the county and the Town Council could buy the mobile home park, and the tenants could pay those entities for the use of that land. This would stabilize an entire community.

If they are serious about addressing affordable housing, they must include mobile homes. What's wrong with setting aside that property for that purpose? It seems our local government would rather rip apart a community of good people who work in our businesses and pay their share of taxes than come up with a workable solution for these residents.

It's time for the Board of Supervisors and the Leesburg Council to think outside their boxes.

— Melanie Rider, Leesburg

A Community

Editor:

In 1982, as I completed my term as president of the Washington Chapter of the Society for International Development, my colleagues gave me a framed print. For over 40 years this print has hung on my wall, occasionally dusted, but never looked at directly until by chance last week.

The print has a cluster of bright colors—red, green, blue and yellow—in the center surrounded on three sides by a deep black as if it was a thick moving flow. And written in script are the words of Barbara Ward, a noted British economist of the era: "We are either going to become

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