

Letter from the Editor – Your plan

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Hollywood, MD - When riding the roads of Southern Maryland your curiosity is sure to get a rise from spying construction activity on the roadsides. “What are they building there now?” You no doubt ask yourself. It doesn’t matter what it is—a church, a store, a house, an apartment building, cell phone tower or school—the discovery prompts many questions including “when did they decide to do this?” This leads to an even more important question, “who are ‘they?’” “And, you might also wonder, “why wasn’t I consulted?”

Construction projects just don’t happen. In America, even the richest of men and women don’t just wake up one morning and decide to build something substantial—at least not immediately. Rome wasn’t built in a day but it was built a lot quicker than anything that has appeared since the practice of planning and zoning was mandated.

The concept of planning and zoning is innately socialistic. It is government telling you what you can and cannot build on your property. What makes it palatable to even the masses who detest socialism is the fact that it is strictly local. The decision-makers are your neighbors and for the most part, so are the regulation enforcers. What gets built on a property can potentially have adverse impacts on adjacent properties. It can also impact shared aspects, such as roads, infrastructure and the environment.

There are a few myths about planning and projects that are not easy to “debunk away” from some people’s mindset. For example, your elected officials do not decide what grocery or restaurant chain—or restaurant cuisine—can locate in your county’s commercial zones. The reason there is no Trader Joe’s in Southern Maryland is because at this time Trader Joe’s doesn’t want to be here. It has nothing to do with politics and everything to do with demographics and economics, as well as that particular company’s business strategy.

The other myth is that nobody wants your opinion and there is no opportunity to give it. Actually, planning sessions in all three counties and the handful of municipalities are open to the public. Public comment is often allowed at those meetings and submitted written comments are always accepted. Keep in mind a property owner has the prerogative to build and/or locate any type of business permitted on their property. But public outcry can and does make a difference. Furthermore, the individuals who sit on planning commissions, appeals boards and various subcommittees related to planning and zoning come from the ranks of citizens who decided to get involved.

One thing that isn’t a myth is that every jurisdiction likely has a huge number of documented regulations. Yet, even with all the well-intentioned regulations, unintentional things do occur.

In 2018, we urge you to listen carefully to what the candidates for local office say about commercial, residential and industrial growth. Do they want more, do they want less? How do they propose to make the processes—everything from obtaining permits to facilitating protests—more people friendly? And, also ask yourself, “what do I want?” In terms of local politics, it—growth—is appropriately the biggest issue. Every generation gets a say in it. Your presence in the community makes you the most important stakeholder.

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Contact Marty Madden at marty.madden@thebaynet.com

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