

**Washington
County News**

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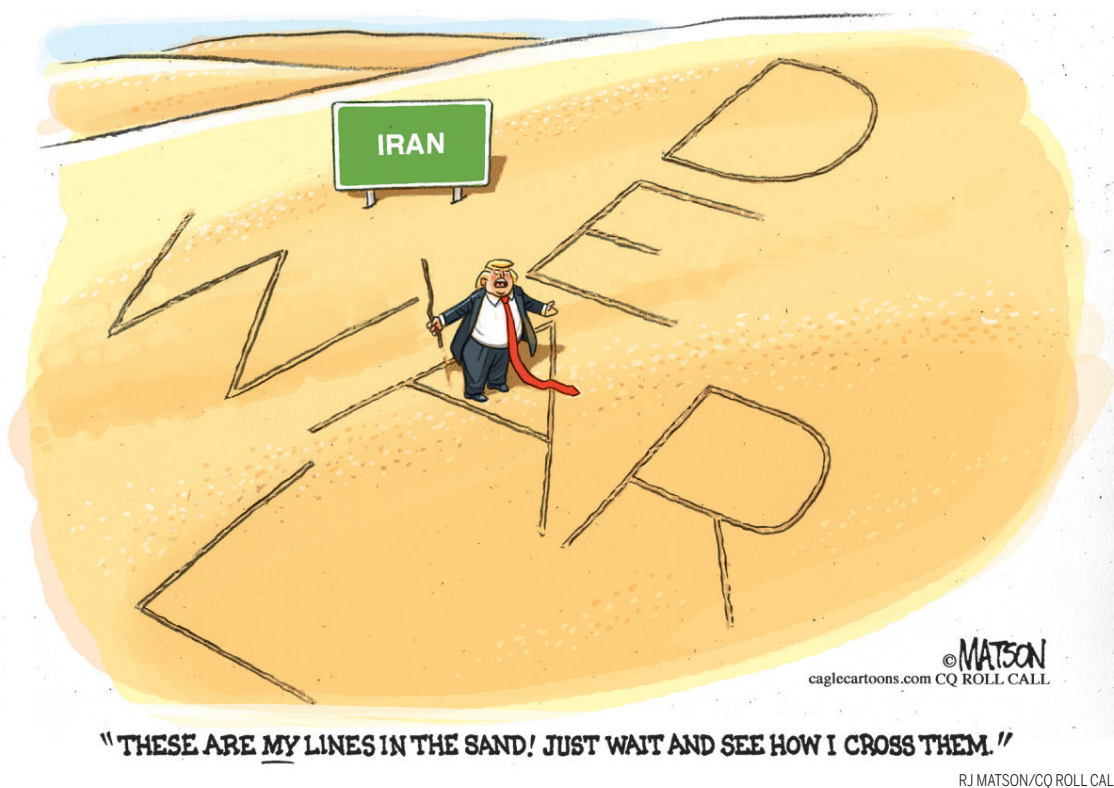
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FOA prove they are no friends of Abingdon in Pal's appeal

The latest attempt by the Friends of Abingdon group to throw a monkey wrench into development of The Meadows of Abingdon might best be described as downright silly — if it weren't such a serious matter.

This group originally tried its best to stop the development off Interstate 81's Exit 17 that will include a new Food City and other retail outlets, along with a town-owned sports complex.

Now five members of this self-serving group of people, who apparently subscribe to the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) theory of progress, seek to throw their dubious political muscle against a planned business tenant of The Meadows, a Pal's Sudden Service fast-food drive-thru.

The group makes the ridiculous claim that the teal blue exterior color of the small Pal's building would not coordinate with other structures in the development and would not follow the town's zoning codes.

So the Friends of Abingdon group has filed an appeal to overturn the Abingdon Planning Commission's May 20 approval of the standard design of the chain's restaurants, popular for their burgers, hot dogs, fries and iced tea.

"The whole [appeal] is centered around whether it's going to be teal," Abingdon Town Manager Jimmy Morani told the Bristol Herald Courier last week for a story by reporter Joe Tennis.

Now, that appeal is threatening Pal's decision to open its first Abingdon location.

"Should the Town of Abingdon rescind the previously approved certificate, we will be forced to choose not to construct a restaurant at the location," Pal's Chief Executive Officer Thom Crosby said in a statement released last week.

A decision to back out of its commitment to The Meadows would cost the area about 60 jobs and, according to Morani, an estimated \$200,000 to \$220,000 in sales tax revenue annually for the town.

"That is approximately one-third of the annual debt service for the sports complex," the town

manager said.

The color and design are what Crosby called "important elements of the Pal's brand," including depictions of a hot dog, hamburger, "Frenchie Fries" and a "Big Tea" on the outside of the brand's trademark teal building.

At Thursday's work session, the Town Council agreed to consider the appeal at its Monday [July 1] meeting.

"I don't know how the rest of the council feels, but I feel we should hear the appeal as soon as possible because we've been accused of not being business-friendly," Mayor Wayne Craig said during the work session.

"Council will hear this as an appellate body, essentially," said Cameron Bell, the town's acting legal counsel. "There will be a standard review ... to look at the Planning Commission's decision."

The commission approved the design by a 4-1 vote, with only member Wayne Austin opposing.

"There was extensive discussion at the Planning Commission level about the design," Bell said. "The issue seems to be primarily in the appeal of the color of the building itself."

The Abingdon Sports Complex, estimated to cost about \$7 million, is being built by the town and is a key component of The Meadows, according to the Herald Courier story. Besides anchor Food City, tenants of The Meadows' commercial side will include Eastman Credit Union, Holiday Inn Express and other restaurants, in addition to Pal's.

Friends of Abingdon was formed in opposition to development of The Meadows and in 2016 filed a lawsuit in an attempt to stop the project. But the suit was eventually dismissed, and the project was allowed to move forward.

A ridiculous move such as this one — objecting to an element of The Meadows project over the color of a small outbuilding — smacks of petty obstructionism and should be resoundingly rejected by the Town Council.

It's time to tell the Friends of Abingdon: "Enough is enough."

Our View

Your View

Randy Sharrow Why you would want to mess with a wildly successful franchise coming in with all the traffic it will bring harkens me to people with the simple mindset of we want things the way they always were. People that can change with the times are destined to be stuck in the past. Everyone knows Pal's will only help the Meadows.

Jason Kell If it is that big of a deal then why not just move two miles up the road to exit 19. They could go in front of Walmart and behind Bojangles. That's why Walmart moved to Washington County instead of the town.

Natisha Brown There's a "dine in, sit down" Pals in Greeneville TN that is built into a shopping center that matches all the other buildings around it, brick and glass. Not teal. The teal one is up on hwy 11-E next to all the other franchise boxes

Deb Petry Pals is really the only thing about this construction that interests me. I am about tired of living in the town of Abingdon. This area is so far

from main st, who cares what color it is!!! Fight for the Fields-Penn house. That building needs saving if we truly care about our history.

James D. Keith Can't they do it like the one in J.C. All fancy brick work. Not the bright colors. I'm sure they can work it out if they really want to.

Shelli Shaver They don't like the teal color but this is one of the most reputable businesses around.. however they will approve of destroying beautiful scenery to allow another food city to be built .. that's dysfunction in town

Tyler Allie Kick rocks "Friends of Abingdon." If this is "not an attempt to keep Pal's from Abingdon" and the CEO has said they aren't changing a thing or they'll back out...then to progress any subsequent appeals IS an attempt to keep Pal's from Abingdon. Let successful business models and free enterprise work its magic and deliver great revenue results for the town... adapt, be open to positive change, and again, go kick rocks.

John Finessee Whitaker Silliness happens. It can probably be worked out. What is more tragic is the state of what is called food when it is neither nourishing nor nutritious at all! Equally as traffic is factory farming of animals. It is inhumane, nothing short of cruelty. We can do better! We can be better! Let's do that!

Mike Lance Pals is good quality food and I've never had a complaint with Pals food. It's been good everytime that I've ate there. The color and design of the building is unique and is what makes Pals stand out especially to tourists. If Abington doesn't let them build it the way all Pals restaurants are then if I was Pals I would not put my restaurant in Abington. Talk about being petty.

Melissa Green-Nava For real? That part of Abingdon should welcome any signs of life, including a teal colored Pal's because it's to the point it's practically dead. If this is how the town is going to do things, then Pal's should just move on up to Exit 19 or elsewhere locally and be done with it.

Be a gardener

“Be a gardener. Dig a ditch. Toil and sweat. And turn the earth upside down. And seek the deepness. And water plants in time. Continue this labor. And make sweet floods to run, and noble and abundant fruits to spring. Take this food and drink, and carry it to God as your true worship.”

— Julian of Norwich, (1342-1416)

♦ ♦ ♦

Once again, we were late planting our small garden of raised beds. For that matter, we were late

preparing the beds: refilling them with

Breathing Room

C.A. Rollins

layers of shredded leaves, aged manure, bits of dried grass and compost. It becomes rich soil.

Our land is so different from what my forebears knew. Flat (or reasonably so), rich, dark earth belonged to my grandparents, plowed time and again, stirring up that pungent smell of potential growing things. My uncle told of my great-grandmother planting rows of cabbages. At season's end, she would pull up the cabbages, root and all, turning them upside down into the furrows, burying them once more in the dark earth. The soil insulated the cabbages so the family would have food in winter.

Without my partner's effort, our dirt would be disappointing at best. Red clay, good only for growing sorry, green grass and dandelions, lies on this sloping, former dairy land. Our raised beds are a labor of love for my husband. He believes it is important to teach the children how to grow food, to feed themselves and others, to retain skills that many in our era are losing.

If our livelihoods depended on it, as it did for my forebears, we would have been more timely, sewing seeds and preparing the earth from its wintry rest. We supplement our food supply with homegrown tomatoes, cucumbers, yellow squash, sweet peas, peppers, zucchini, potatoes, melons and more. I remember my grandparents had all of the above, along with winter squashes, pumpkins, green beans, rhubarb and endless rows of corn.

Tending the earth and producing food is a holy work, set apart in an age so deeply steeped in trying to escape from the world outside our doors. Sinking one's fingers into the soil feels sacramental, as if breaking the bread and hearing the words of the celebrant: "This is my body, broken for you." Carrying water from our rain barrels and pouring it out onto the soil surrounding our plants seems reminiscent of the words of Jesus: "This is my precious blood poured out for you."

"Seek the deepness," Dame Julian wrote. She was an ancho-rite, dwelling in a small chamber attached to the parish church in Norwich. As an anchorite, her work was spiritual: study, prayer, writing. I have wondered how she knew so deeply the truth of the earth and our interactions with it. She saw God in all things. Still, it remains so.

Dame Julian of Norwich wrote the oldest extant text, "The Revelations of Divine Love," penned by a woman. Something powerful streams from God through her heart and onto the page. Something lasting, indeed, for most words of women from those days are long since gone.

"Continue this labor," Julian wrote, "and carry it to God as your true worship."

Longing to breathe deeply and to walk with others as they seek to meet their longings, C.A. Rollins writes and invites you to reflect with her at carollinswrites@gmail.com.

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STEVE SACK/THE MINNEAPOLIS STAR-TRIBUNE, MINNESOTA

Even in Richmond, business leaders can see what our region has to offer

It was heartening to see last week that influential Virginia business leaders all the way to Richmond are taking notice of the potential of our region when it comes to creating jobs and preparing a strong workforce.

Tom Barkin, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, came to Abingdon to hold a roundtable discussion with area educators, business leaders and politicians on ways to boost the post-coal economy through initiatives such as workforce development.

They met at the United Way of Southwest Virginia in Abingdon to share ideas of what could stimulate the region's economy, which until recently depended mostly on coal mining.

Having a stable, trained and ready workforce is considered one of the most important elements for attracting industries in the new economy to relocate or expand in our region, bringing jobs that go beyond tourism and service occupations in creating a stable economy.

"I came here because, as we have done our research, this seems like the kind of place that has worked successfully against the barriers that so many other small towns have," Barkin told the roundtable participants.

"Education is strong," he said. "Technology has been deployed. You've got a hardworking set of people. So what I'm trying to understand is: What are the remaining barriers?"

Barkin also discussed the United Way of Southwest Virginia's youth workforce development initiative, Ignite, designed to promote careers by connecting schools and students with employers and employees.

Losing mining jobs has led to reductions in affiliated trades such as welding and general construction, said participant Brian Austin, superintendent of Lee County Public Schools.

"To a degree, we're mourning a loss of an industry," Mary Trigiani, senior vice president for strategic planning and development at New Peoples Bank, told the group.

Participants suggested that collaboration among localities throughout the region is also necessary to attract business and industry to Southwest Virginia, with the area speaking as one voice to promote itself.

"Our product has to be regional," Trigiani said. "That's the story that's going to attract people."

Our View

Barkin agreed with that concept while pointing out the area's "cute towns" and assets like the University of Virginia's College at Wise.

Another challenge is to keep our young people in the region so they can become part of the necessary workforce, rather than having them leave to seek better futures elsewhere, Barkin said.

"Part of my objective is to be able to put forward what it takes to win," he told the group. "... There's a better opportunity to tell the story, particularly to future employees — people who are leaving town who may not see the opportunities that are going to be here and may want to come back."

The sad fact is that many of our would-be future workers don't see those opportunities ahead in Southwest Virginia because, for the most part, they really haven't materialized yet.

Many young workers who do get the training they'll need for the jobs that could secure their futures probably won't be patient enough to wait very long for those opportunities to arise.

But even though some may give up and move away, the push to develop a workforce for those willing to stay must remain our top priority. Without a ready and able workforce, our job recruitment efforts will be in vain.

Our region has some key advantages that many other areas don't. First and foremost is an unmatched quality of life created by our geography, which provides ample outdoor recreation activities and unmatched scenic beauty.

We have a wonderful story to tell both to our young people and our prospective employers. The key will be to get that story out to where the right people will hear it.

Modernize courthouse but maintain historic downtown

BY JOHN M. LAMIE

To me, Abingdon's courthouse has always represented the ideal set out by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Lewis F. Powell: "Public buildings often accurately reflect the beliefs, priorities, and aspirations of a people ... For much of our history, the courthouse has served not just as a local center of the law and government but as a meeting ground, cultural hub, and social gathering place."

But the courthouse has also stood for more than 150 years, and, rightly, the Board of Supervisors is now considering how to address space, access and security issues. All of these options end up — whether now or 10 years from now — shuttering the current courthouse, dramatically changing downtown Abingdon with a large, empty historic building and the likely relocation of businesses that have grown on Main Street to be near it.

There are certainly better long-term solutions for the county that can modernize the courthouse and protect our historical integrity as a community.

We can start by reexamining the study forming the basis of the three options. It reduces the problem to simple math: We need to have 88,000 square feet of space to operate the Circuit Court, General District Court and Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, all of which currently operate in the 47,000

square feet of the existing courthouse. The study fails to acknowledge three critical points:

First, those three courts existing under one roof is a relatively recent development. When I began my practice, the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court was located on the corner of Main Street and Russell Road, and the Commonwealth's Attorney operated out of the Sheriff's Office at the foot of courthouse hill.

Second, the study does not take into account the reality that Virginia, like other states and the federal courts, will within the near future require all electronic filing, creating more space as the need for paper files disappears.

Finally, the study does not take into consideration the growing popularity of alternative dispute resolution, which the court system now encourages. Parties often settle litigation using this process, reducing the need for a courtroom.

If we want a modern courthouse for Abingdon, we can and should be building it for a modern court system. We need to make the Washington County, Virginia, courthouse more accessible, comfortable and safe, but we can do so while keeping our historic building open as an actual, working courthouse at the center of Abingdon.

John M. Lamie is the managing attorney for Browning, Lamie, and Gifford P.C. He has lived and worked in Abingdon for nearly four decades.

There is no one solution to mass killings; there are many

Growing up in these mountains and valleys, I saw roadside memorials spring up. A cross, a wreath, an angel, bouquets of flowers — all were placed to mark a

Breathing Room

C.A. Rollins

tragic death, unexpected. Of course, these were reminders of lives cut short. Perhaps these are markers not only of grief and loss, but also anger and betrayal.

In rural communities, it was likely that the reckless or drunken driver who caused the tragedy was known to the family and friends of the victim. During the 1960s and '70s, populations were less transient and mobile. Families shared one car. As we drove to my grandparents' home in an adjacent county, I recall seeing these places of homage appear alongside the interstate, cautiously located outside the range of mowers and the road. It seemed that just as soon as a highway crew would remove a memorial, another would appear. In Appalachia, these roadside memorials seem commonplace, even today.

Over the last decade, folks began to use their vehicles as rolling memorials to loved ones with stickers of birth and death dates and names embossed starkly. Arms, chests, backs tattooed with the same remembrances and people become walking bearers of memory and loss.

As I write, I know two things: First, our nation grieves again; second, by the time this piece goes to print, the shock of it will have worn off. A family member of mine shared an article from The New York Times about the El Paso shooting, commenting: "The world is going crazy." Meanwhile, I woke to NPR's "Morning Edition." Their social media department wrote, "We never thought we'd have to post this back-to-back, but there's been a second major mass shooting ..." as they posted the story of Dayton, Ohio's same-day mass murder.

Call it what you will: a dearth of appropriate mental and behavioral health resources, lax gun regulation, a major increase in hatred aimed at various groups of people based on race, sexuality and class. I frankly no longer care what any single one of us wants to blame this mess on. This is a mess. It has been a mess. And to my family member, I wrote, "We have been crazy for a long time, especially since Sandy Hook."

Kind reader, you recall Sandy Hook, don't you? A mere six and a half years ago, 20 children and six adults were killed by gun violence at an elementary school in Connecticut. That we could not come up with multiple solutions to care for one another in the face of this phenomenon of mass killings is truly a sign of our madness, our brokenness and our self-destruction.

My daughter just came in the room as her father and I discussed this column. We have not talked about the issue around her. She came and said, "Mommy, guns are what die you." Somewhere, she has caught a very clear message. Our 4-year-old should not have to encounter a society where she already knows about running, hiding and lying flat on the ground. No child should.

We cannot look at this problem as an either/or. Meaning, this is not either a gun issue or a mental health issue. This is an all-in, every hand on, every person, both/and matter. We are smarter, braver, more hopeful, courageous, creative and caring people than this miry bog of muck we have allowed to claim us.

Let us quit casting blame and calling names. Let's come up with multilateral. We do not need a land covered in memorials. We need a creative people committed to hope.

Longing to breathe deeply and to walk with others as they seek to meet their longings, C.A. Rollins writes and invites you to reflect with her at carollinswrites@gmail.com.

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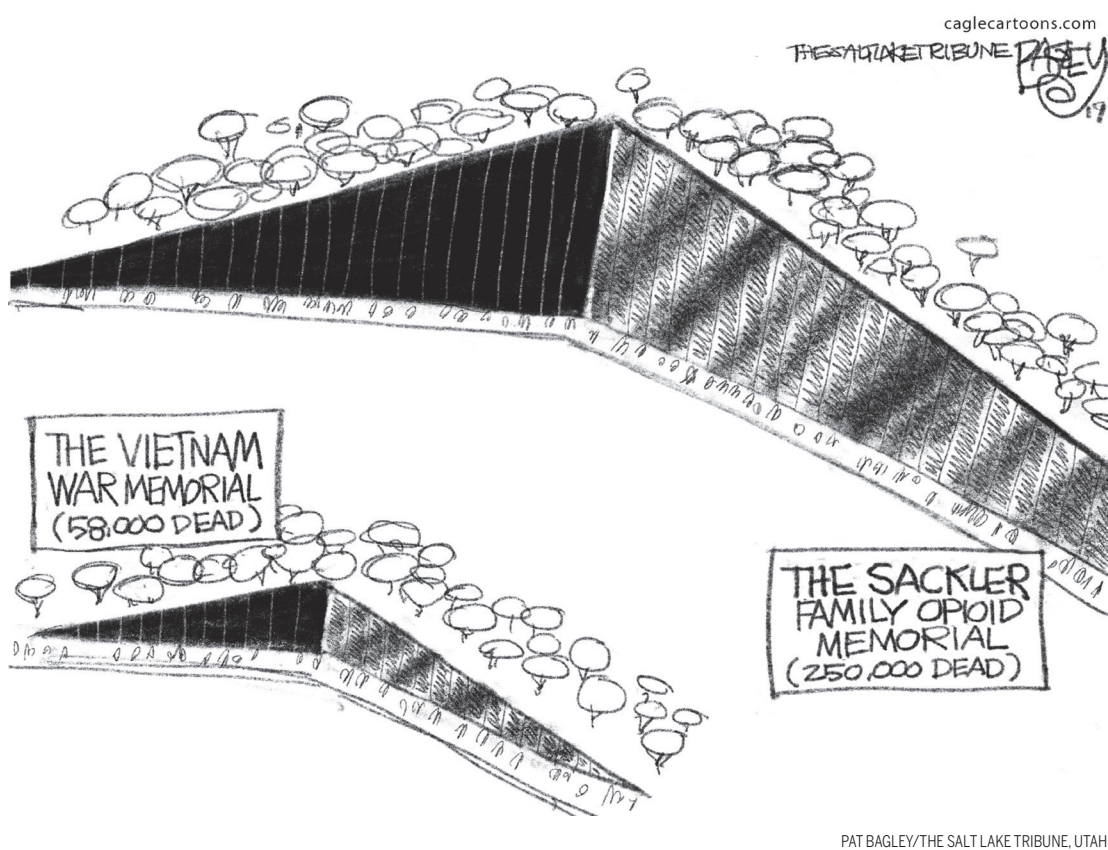
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PAT BAGLEY/THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE, UTAH

A failure to communicate

No matter which way you might be leaning on the proposed move of the Washington County courts to a former Kmart building in Abingdon, it's clear that the town and the county should have worked together to iron out any issues they might have well before now.

Yes, there are good arguments for and against moving the courts from the historic Washington County Courthouse in downtown Abingdon. That's why the county's Board of Supervisors has decided to put the question to the voters in a referendum on Nov. 5.

But to some observers, it seems that the town of Abingdon is focused on thwarting attempts to let the people of Abingdon and Washington County decide the issue.

Abingdon, which arguably has a lot at stake in the debate, may be relying on arbitrary and somewhat obscure interpretation of state law and town ordinances to stop the move of the courts even should the voters approve the idea.

But it's also easy to see why the town is doing that. From the town's point of view, the county might seem to be pushing the idea of moving the courthouse against the town's will, without any consideration as to what the people of Abingdon want, or what its zoning plans would support.

The Town Council and Town Manager Jimmy Morani contend that relocating court operations to the old Kmart just off Interstate 81's Exit 17 would violate the current zoning ordinances.

That's because the town has decided that the current B-2 General Business District zoning of that site would not permit a courthouse — even though that zoning does permit “public offices.”

Perhaps county officials should have communicated better with the town and found out whether the town would accept a courthouse on that site under the present zoning, or if not, agree to change the zoning to accommodate the courthouse.

Presumably, county officials looked at the zoning for the site before proposing the move and concluded that courts would easily qualify as public offices. But it sure would have made for less controversy if county officials had just asked first, to make sure the town and the county were on the same page.

Last week, the Town Council rejected the county government's request that it consider amending the zoning to add “courthouse” as a permitted use in a B-2 General Business District.

The town manager and town attorney have also decided that letting citizens petition the town planning

commission to amend the zoning ordinance violates state law, and that such a request should be denied — even though the town planning code allows for such requests.

Washington County Attorney Lucy Phillips spoke to the Town Council last week and also sent a five-page letter to members of the council and planning commission in defense of the rule in the town code that allows the public to request zoning text amendments, according to a story in the Bristol Herald Courier.

The town's acting counsel, Cameron Bell, said in a Sept. 6 letter to Phillips that the rule violates state law, which allows only governing bodies to amend ordinances.

But “it is illogical to conclude that the acceptance of an application equals amendment of the zoning ordinance,” Phillips said in her letter. “The Town's acceptance of an application brings a citizen's request to the attention of the Commission and Council, which may initiate the process for amending of the zoning ordinance.”

Phillips also asked the Town Council: “Can any one of you really accept that it's beyond the scope of the town's authority to receive requests for changes in the town's zoning law from its own citizens?”

She added that citizen involvement “is part of the bedrock of democracy.”

The key here, though, is that while citizens may petition for a change in the zoning, the planning commission or the Town Council doesn't have to approve the request. And at this point, it doesn't seem that the town would approve the change either way, so even entertaining a petition would seem to be a waste of time.

As for the November referendum, it might very well be that the voters decide — maybe even overwhelmingly — that they don't want to move the courts to the Kmart building. And if that's the way it goes, we should all be fine with that.

But if the vote goes the other way, it's going to be hard for the town of Abingdon to justify hiding behind zoning ordinances to go against the will of the people — unless, perhaps, a strong majority of voters who live within the town limits reject the move.

At that point, one would have to consider whether it would be fair for the rest of the voters of Washington County to dictate what goes on within the town limits, especially on zoning and planning issues.

That's why all of this should have been sorted out before the county commissioners called for the referendum.

Your View

The old Kmart should be adapted to new business, not courthouse

Maybe it is time to help the Washington County supervisors and Marathon/K-VA-T/Food City think of a good use of the old Kmart building in Abingdon's Town Centre.

Here are some suggestions of stores that would be nice to have there: Kohl's, Dillard's, Stein Mart, Pottery Barn, Panera Bread, Chico's, Talbots and/or H&M.

Ironically I have heard many people say they would love to see Kmart reopened there.

Or consider an indoor gaming area — a place to go when it is raining on the Creeper Trail — with bowling, go-karts, wall-scaling,

trampolines, pool and ping pong tables, an arcade, a Lego room, bumper cars and darts. Maybe not darts?

What about turning the old Kmart building into an expanded and updated Washington County Public Library? It needs more space anyway, and in the Town Centre, it would be located within walking distance of the restaurants at Exit 17.

I hope others will add their suggestions of how to use the old Kmart for a good business purpose.

Beth McCoy
Abingdon, Virginia

Keep the courthouse

After reading attorney John Lamie's letter about

the courthouse dilemma, I have had a change of opinion. I will have to say that his idea of moving Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court and other offices to another location and leaving the original courthouse free for circuit court seems like a very good one to me. He also mentioned closing Court Street, thereby giving more parking spaces — another excellent idea.

The citizens of Abingdon and Washington County should consider these proposals earnestly. The courthouse has a beautiful architectural structure and should remain as our courthouse. Modernization sometimes takes away that quaint atmosphere we treasure so much.

Eula Helton
Abingdon, Virginia

Dancing in the rain

Stepping from the airplane, I knew this was an altogether different place than I had ever visited. On the outskirts of the city, the rough roads were unlike any other entry point. Short, squat, cinderblock buildings with tall, wrought-iron fences, fearsome gates and metal roofs lined the streets.

The main road was flooded. Sanitation workers shoveled to clear ditches so that the clogged water could flow. Even though they steadily scooped, emptied

and scooped again, it seemed that it would take weeks to

clear the mess.

Most people walked. Children played with sticks and sang at the top of their lungs. Colorful buses and trucks, called “tap-taps,” rumbled up and down the way. Horns beeped constantly.

We drove past a community water source not unlike hand-pumps at rustic campsites. Children and women had 5- and 10-gallon containers they filled to carry to their homes for cooking and drinking. Fresh water did not flow via pipes into most homes. Collect and carry was the only option.

Men and women alike slapped their wet laundry on stones creekside. In some neighborhoods, children yelled in a tone that sounded almost like a curse, “Blanc! Blanc!” In others, children smiled widely and waved as they ran alongside our 15-passenger van.

We arrived at the mission. It was half of a former monastery compound. The monks now lived in the dormitories. The half where we gathered had become a retreat center for missionaries serving across the Haitian countryside.

Within a few hours, a group of college students from a large university arrived at the compound. After a simple supper, rain began to fall. We watched as these students, who would return to the United States the next day, danced in the rain. They grabbed bars of soap and washed themselves — hair, faces and bodies — while still fully dressed. We wondered if there was something we didn't know or understand.

We would soon learn.

Memories of my experiences in Haiti circa 1996 came rushing back yesterday. We have not felt rain in six long weeks. The dry earth aches and heaves. In the eventide, clouds gathered. The blue sky grayed. Drops began to sound on our roof. I couldn't help myself! I shouted with glee and ran outside to dance in the rain and praise God.

We have spigots, pipes and hoses. So does Haiti. But in the mid-1990s, the water of Port-au-Prince was turned on only at certain times. Residents would collect what they needed to get through the stretches of hours without.

On the day we arrived, the water main for the city had broken. Water flowed nonstop for three days. In response, once shut off, the water did not run for an equal amount of time. Without warning, the people would suffer. It was difficult to understand.

Even now, I know the explanations we received 23 years ago were oversimplified for a first-world audience. We were in a sheltered, supported area. Meanwhile the slums of Cité-Soleil struggled with immense poverty in their homes of concrete, metal, cardboard and scavenged stuff.

We went to help. I wonder now how our helping helped. It surely brought funds to an impoverished place. We were to build a church, but we could not get permits from a corrupt government. We helped instead with a mountain church and a city orphanage. The people and lessons of the land helped us.

By the end of our week, we knew what it was to be so very dry. We had learned about consuming more than our share of stored water. And we learned why those college students danced in the rain.

On our last evening in Haiti, it rained. In the downpour, we danced. With bars of soap, we washed every bit ourselves, unconcerned that we remained fully dressed. We blessed God for the water and prayed for the people who needed renewing Water of Life.

Where do you find replenishing? What is dry and aching? Where have you seen deserts spring to life?

Longing to breathe deeply and to walk with others as they seek to meet their longings, C.A. Rollins writes and invites you to reflect with her at carollinswrites@gmail.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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