

THE DALLAS POST

EDITORIALS

Lehman district's quick fix could harm region's potential

So you want to go out and have some fun? And you heard they have some good shows at the new amphitheater at Harveys Lake. Better hurry — your choices may be limited soon, courtesy of a new tax rendered by the Lake-Lehman School District.

Apparently in order to avoid an even greater increase in property taxes in the district, the school board voted to impose a 10% tax on admission charges at entertainment and recreation facilities. While bashful about property taxes, the seven board members who voted for the new tax sure didn't restrain themselves; they went for the maximum allowable rate right off the bat. For all the fuss, the district estimates that taxing fun will bring in only \$65,000, equivalent to 2.25 mills of property assessment. To put that into perspective, 2.25 mills is 1.3% of the present property tax rate of 176 mills in Luzerne County. As it is, next year's tax rate is slated to increase to 188 mills, or 6.8%.

The appeal of an amusement tax is obvious; in theory it would apply largely to people who don't live in the district and it is levied on "amusements," which can be characterized as unnecessary. But there's a dark side that could in the long run be very damaging to the communities in the district, and that is the chilling effect the tax will have on business. The first hint of that came when Thom Greco, the promoter behind the amphitheater, suggested that he would stage fewer shows if the tax holds up, and that those would be in the hard rock vein rather than the more broadly appealing (and quieter) acts already scheduled.

Some observers would say that any tax increase is inappropriate given recent economic conditions. But that argument ignores the changes that have taken place in school funding over the last few years. Shrinking federal and state contributions — without corresponding reductions in mandated programs — have shifted more financial responsibility onto local taxpayers. Long-term contracts negotiated in better times with teachers have added to the burden, at a time when the message from more and more people seems to be, "I don't want to pay for anything unless I get the money right back."

That has caused virtually all school districts to search for new sources of revenue and/or cost reduction, and an amusement tax is one legitimate option. But going for the max without warning smacks of opportunism, not good planning.

In this case, the district's quick fix carries too much risk, both for the district and the municipalities of which it is comprised. Lake-Lehman would be far better to lower its expectations or find an alternative revenue source.

To aid environment without regulation, tax oil and gas

George Bush will be flying down to Rio this week, for what purpose no one seems to know. But it's an election year, and the "environmental president" would have had a hard time explaining his absence.

As in so many other areas, Mr. Bush receives middling marks for his environmental performance. One day he's siding with loggers against the Spotted Owl and the next saying we'll double the money we're giving to other nations to encourage them not to clear-cut their forests. It's hard to figure.

Even his detractors give the President credit for signing the revised Clean Air Act in 1990. But wait; the ink has been dry for two years and there has been no action taken on the act, as it sits in bureaucratic purgatory waiting for the administration to put its principles in the form of rules and regulations. Oops! There's that dirty little word — regulations. Everybody seems to hate them the way they didn't like having to eat broccoli as a child. Without them, some say, we'd be a better place, but in what way seems uncertain.

If George Bush really wanted to do something to help the environment — and do it without unnecessary regulation — he would push through a hefty tax on gasoline and/or crude oil and use the proceeds to re-create a true mass transportation system in this nation. If he did that, these would be the results:

- Automobile manufacturers would develop more fuel-efficient cars and trucks, because fuel economy would be a big selling point.
- All other users of fossil fuels would scramble to use them as efficiently as possible, spawning a new industry devoted to energy-efficiency.
- Oil companies would push headlong into alternative fuels once they saw that there was money to be made there.
- Our dependence on imported oil would drop, and with it the need to play beat cop to the world. As a side benefit, Middle Eastern despots like Saddam Hussein would lose their principal source of cash.
- It would suddenly become feasible to restore train service between major cities, ending the parade of cars with one occupant that now make up the majority of vehicles on our highways.
- And, of course, the volume of pollution released into the air would decline.

Could, would Mr. Bush propose such a step? If this really is a unique political year, when straight-talkin' non-political types have taken center stage, why not? Haven't you seen a horse fly?



Spring beauty

Photo by Maria Sawka

Letters

Dallas zoning could bring subsidized housing

Editor:

In response to a State mandate, Dallas Boro Council has received from the consultant it hired, a comprehensive re-zoning proposal. The principal objective of the mandate appears to be to restructure present zoning regulations in order to avoid "exclusive zoning" — that is, to rezone in order to provide in the Boro for lower cost "affordable" housing to accommodate low income groups.

To accomplish this, various areas of Dallas Boro would be downgraded from the present R-1 zoning to R-2, R-3 and R-3A. A sizable area along Main and Franklin Streets is scheduled to be zoned for multiple family housing (apartments).

At least three objections to this proposal may be voiced as follows:

First, because of the comprehensive nature of the ordinance, much of the Boro Council's present power to influence future development will pass from the Council to the courts. That is, if

developers meet the specifications embodied in the ordinance, there is little that the Council can do to stop implementation. For example, the proposed rezoning of the area along Main and Franklin Streets to multiple-unit housing could bring low-rent/subsidized housing to Dallas. Or: that portion of the ordinance that specifies location of massage parlors, adult bookstores, adult theaters, etc., might well engender just this type of establishment in the proposed business zone.

Second, the proposed change in zoning rules, from those presently pertaining to "special exceptions" to a classification termed "conditional use", not only removes from the average citizen an opportunity to protest a given proposal, but also reduces the Council's power to materially affect any undesired development proposal which may arise.

Third, sooner or later, the proposed changes in zoning rules, in aggregate, would unquestionably result in substantially increased

traffic flows, a greater strain on the Boro's water resources, increased pollution of streams and waterways, increased sewer costs (to finance new extensions), and a heavier burden in municipal and school costs.

This rezoning proposal is a very important piece of work because it will largely determine the framework and character of the next century's Dallas. Is Dallas to become just a duplicate of Wilkes-Barre's crowded environs? Or should we try to maintain its present residential/semi-rural character?

An existing program to develop subsidized low-income housing in Luzerne County (outside of Wilkes-Barre) could mean a targeting of Dallas Boro. In other areas of the county, this type of development has meant a substantial increase in crime as well as much higher security (police) costs. Think about it!

Hugh P. King
Dallas

A. Case for Conservation

Landscapes: Dead or Alive?

By ALENE N. CASE

According to Webster, a landscape is "an expanse of natural scenery seen by the eye in one view." The verb indicates changing "the natural features of a plot of ground so as to make it more attractive, as by adding lawns, trees, bushes, etc." Thus, as we landscape our yards, we are permitted to change the natural order but not to make them unnatural.

Perhaps it is the "etc." that gets us into trouble. Some modern landscaping is a collection of railroad ties, black plastic, pine bark chips, and small white stones. The only living things are a few small azaleas or junipers that will require little care. Somehow, this doesn't fit the definition.

Wilkes University provides a prime example of these "landscaping" techniques. A few years back, they decided that it was inefficient to hire people to pull weeds out of their flower beds. So they put down pine bark on top of sheets of black plastic. Not only did they stop the weed problem but they also completely eliminated the spring bulbs that used to brighten the campus. And now they have a "lovely" mixture of pine bark and cigarette butts surrounding their shrubbery. I say go back to weeding!

So far, so good. You are likely sitting there patting yourself on the back because you have a nice green lawn and a couple of tall shade trees. But, in the most recent issue of *Urban Forests*, Rich

and Marion Patterson make the following startling statement: "The American dream of tall trees and perfect turf is an ecological contradiction." Think about it for a moment. Have you ever walked in a natural forest where the leaf litter had been neatly swept away by the bears and owls? Have you ever seen a natural meadow that had only one type of grass all clipped precisely to a height of 2 inches?

When Europeans see photographs of our expansive lawns, they admire them for a minute or two and then they ask "But, where are the sheep?" Before you laugh at their quaintness, consider how sterile most yards really are. A friend of mine could have used some of those sheep recently when a realtor instructed her to get rid of the dandelions before putting her house up for sale.

It seems that in our search for the perfect landscape we tend toward the unnatural and sterile. We have forgotten how to live with the natural world. Our yards could be providing food for our families and for the creatures who live nearby. We could have fruit trees for early spring blossoms and autumn jellies. We could plant native wildflowers that attract bees, dragonflies and hummingbirds.

Instead of trying so hard to maintain lawn where it does not grow well, plant other groundcovers such as ferns or clover. In fact, clover is a wonderful addition to any lawn. White clover seed can be

mixed with grass seed or sown in bare patches by itself. It provides nitrogen to the soil so that the lawn will need much less fertilizer (possibly none). It doesn't grow as fast as most grasses so the lawn will not need to be mowed as frequently. And, of course, the honeybees will love it.

As you add to the diversity in your yard, you will discover that you have much less trouble with insect pests and noxious weeds. Therefore, you will not be tempted to use chemicals to control them.

You will also discover that there is joy in sharing your space with the birds, animals, and people who live in the vicinity. It has been my unhappy experience that perfect yards often breed unfriendly owners. My husband and I are gratified whenever anyone tells us how much they enjoy going through our yard to look at the fish pool and flowers. We know then that the frogs and birds are not the only neighbors who feel at home here. Our strawberries are enjoyed by an elderly lady who cannot garden. Another elderly neighbor sees our garden columbine in bloom and knows that the seeds from her yard will survive her — she gave them to us 10 years ago.

As you plan future landscaping projects, I challenge you to remember the definition of the word. Try to make your yard as natural a place as possible so that it will be a comfortable habitat for all who dwell there.

Only yesterday

60 Years Ago - June 10, 1932 - DALLAS HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES EIGHT

About 25 Boy Scouts from Shavertown United Methodist Church under direction of Fred Eck, Scoutmaster, will leave Monday by truck on a three day trip to Washington, D.C. with stops at Harrisburg and Gettysburg. In the Capitol the boys will camp along the Potomac.

Eight students will be graduated from Dallas High School at commencement exercises tomorrow. Glendon Moore had attained the highest average for the year and will be awarded \$2.50 in gold by the Dallas Parent Teacher Association. Margaret Hill attained the highest rank in scholarship among the girls will receive a four year scholarship to College Misericordia.

50 Years Ago - June 12, 1942 - TANNERY WORKERS GET PAY RAISE

Wage increase for all workers of Armour Leather Co., tannery at Noxen was approved by the War Labor Department at Washington, D.C. constituting a major victory for the CIO Fur & Leather Workers Union which has sought full recognition from the tannery officials for the past 10 months.

U.S. Marine Elwood Davis visiting his parents Squire and Mrs. Ralph Davis at Alderson this week will board ship in Norfolk, Va. for an unknown destination in the War Zone at the end of his furlough.

In an election which appeared to strongly minimize the new won power of the State Republican Organization in the Back Mountain Region, Peter D. Clark received 37 committeeman votes to 35 for his opponent Arnott Jones of Forty Fort and gained his third consecutive chairmanship of the 6th District.

Engaged - Helen Alberta Kirkendall to Pvt. 1st Class Robert David Appleton.

40 Years Ago - June 13, 1952 - CAROL HEUER LEHMAN VALEDICTORIAN

Lehman-Jackson High School held commencement exercises Wednesday with a number of awards and diplomas presented. Carol J. Heuer was valedictorian and received a number of awards. Kenneth Meade was Salutatorian and received the Alumni Key for highest average on commercial course.

For members of the many committees of the 6th annual Back Mountain Memorial Library Auction the next four weeks will be busy ones. New and old goods are beginning to fill the barn for auction to be held July 10, 11 and 12.

Wed - Mildred Culp to Pvt. Albert Kern.

"With a Song In My Heart" starring Susan Hayward and David Wayne now playing at Himmeler Theatre.

30 Years Ago - June 14, 1962 - FIRECHIEF'S SONS ESCAPE BLAZE

Commencement of the first class of 141 seniors to graduate from the new Dallas Senior High School building, was held in the gym with the rostrum open in both directions toward the gym and toward the auditorium to accommodate a banner crowd.

Trapped by a fire on the second floor of a frame dwelling, cause unknown, the three sons of Fire Chief Joseph Ide made their way safely down a ladder erected at an open window by a neighbor. The family escaped in night clothing, all their possessions were a total loss.

20 Years Ago - June 15, 1972 - DER TO TEST HARVEYS LAKE FOR BACTERIA

Samplings of Harveys Lake water will be taken this week and tested by DER. Bacteriological testing of water and four public beaches are reported as being planned. Of the four beaches, Hanson's and Sandy Beach are currently closed. It is not known at this time if they will continue to be closed for the summer.

Denise Sherwood, Girl Scout Troop 660, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R. Sherwood, Shavertown, has been selected to represent Penns Woods Council at a two week scouting event "Footprints in the Jersey Sands" to be held in Brigantine, New Jersey.

Plans to hold commencement ceremonies out of doors at the athletic field were thwarted when heavens loosed a downpour just before 220 Dallas High School seniors were scheduled to graduate and moved indoors to the Junior High auditorium.

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