

EDITORIAL

It's time to develop serious fire protection plans

It's hard to know who won and who lost, or if it was a draw between Kingston Township and John Halbing, the developer of the proposed Windsor Farms subdivision. After turning down Halbing's preliminary plan over access and safety issues, the supervisors reversed course and gave a thumbs up on appeal. Whether they did so because all their concerns were satisfied or because they feared a lawsuit over the rejection is uncertain, and the answer probably depends on where one stands on growth and development issues.

One of the biggest sticking points seemed to be a desire on the part of the township for fire protection, which is addressed in an ordinance requiring hydrants in areas that have access to adequate water supplies. That's where this particular situation gets murky — the water plan for Windsor Farms wavered between individual wells and connection to a nearby development's system and while the planning commission approved of the former, the supervisors did not. When Windsor Farms was relieved of the hydrant requirement it appeared water would come from the Sunrise Estates Water Company, but that could not provide sufficient pressure for hydrants.

This situation leaves open the probability that three substantial housing developments, each located adjacent to the other, will be served by water systems that are barely adequate to provide household water, and developers have been relieved of the responsibility to come up with enough volume and pressure to fight fires.

Kingston Township and the rest of the Back Mountain are under pressure brought on by housing growth and the accompanying issues of water and land use. We have reached the point that old solutions no longer provide sufficient protection for either, and each new subdivision raises the burden not only on natural resources but on the human resources that are available to care for the land and respond to emergencies. Fire hydrants fed by an adequate supply of water would make it possible for volunteer firefighters to bring more tools to bear more quickly when a fire breaks out, perhaps averting a tragedy. The weakness of the present system was illustrated by a house fire in the Cedar Lane development, just up Manor Drive from Windsor Farms, only a few weeks ago.

It can be costly for a developer to install a hydrant system, but the value is incalculable to someone who loses a home or family member to fire, and to those called to quell a blaze. A cooperative effort between developers, water companies and government must be found that will provide adequate protection, spreading the expense beyond individual neighborhoods, if necessary.

Publisher's Notebook

Ron Bartizek



If your family is like mine, there are many times during the week when the television is tuned to one in the current crop of situation comedy shows, dramas or movies that attract the attention of children and teenagers. (I'd better be careful here, my kids may fit the age category but like yours, believe they are far too grown up to be considered children.) The themes are all too familiar; kids either need some help from mom and dad or are eager to offer their unique insights but the bumbling parents are just too dense to notice. So, the role reversals begin and in the end everybody appreciates one another more and lives happily ever after. For the most part.

Aside from the simplistic story lines, I've noticed something else that's disturbing — everyone on television is 'rich!' I don't mean they dangle obnoxious gold chains around their necks like athletes, but every family lives in a beautiful large home with an immaculate yard and drives cars that only a minority of real people can afford. This is true even of the preacher whose family runs at five cph (crises per hour), some of which take more than one episode to resolve. So, what gives? I remember when ministers with multiple off-spring lived in ramshackle houses provided by the congregation or even in an addition to the church. And even though incomes rose in the last few years, I don't think everyone lives on a pretty acre lot in the best suburbs yet.

It goes without saying that all these characters are handsome or beautiful, depending on the angle you're coming from, and none are dually challenged. The exception seems to be comedians, which I guess means it's still okay to laugh at fat people, at least for a season or two.

And another thing; these people don't work. Whether they're young or old, single or married, they seem to be independently wealthy or have jobs that take about an hour a day but pay enough to support the good life. This is definitely not reality television.

When I discussed these observations with my 12-year-old son, he pointed out that one family on television is a lot closer to the masses. The Simpsons, while cartoon characters, are a lot more like some of the real people I meet than are the too-perfect inhabitants of most celluloid fantasies. So what if they're yellow.

Letters, columns and editorials

The Dallas Post attempts to publish opinions on a variety of topics in many forms.

Editorials, which are the opinion of the management of The Post, appear on the editorial page and are written by the editor unless otherwise indicated. Any artwork represents the opinion of the cartoonist, and columns are the opinion of the author.

Letters to the editor are welcome and will be published, subject to the following guidelines:

- Letters should not exceed 500 words.
- No writer may have more than one letter published during a 30-day period, except as a reply to another letter.
- Letters must be signed and include the writer's home town and a telephone number for verification.
- Names will be withheld only if there exists a clear threat to the writer.
- The Post retains the right to accept or reject any letter, and to edit letters for grammar and spelling, as well as to eliminate any libel, slander or objectionable wording.

In addition to letters, we welcome longer pieces that may run as columns. The author or subject's relevance to the Back Mountain will be the prime consideration when selecting material for publication.

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Blooms of early summer. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

GUEST COLUMN

Concerns with forest property taxes in Pennsylvania

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Although there is a preferential tax for forestland in Pennsylvania, there are concerns about the program among private forest landowners, forest industry representatives, and county officials. The preferential tax program commonly known as Clean and Green bases the assessment on the land's ability to produce income in its current use, rather than its fair market value. The Pennsylvania legislature created Clean and Green in 1974 with the objective of conserving farm and forestland by providing tax incentives for landowners not to convert their land to other uses. The program objectives are especially important in urbanizing counties where development pressures are high.

The preferential assessment under Clean and Green is formula-based. It uses projected timber yields, current stumpage prices, and interest rates to determine use values for an 80-year timber rotation. Until recently, landowners were less concerned with the formula's use values, since stumpage prices were low and interest rates high. Thus, the assessed value for forestland remained relatively low. However, in the 1990s, low inflation (resulting in lower interest rates) and rapidly escalating stumpage prices drove the Clean and Green as-

essments for forestland higher. Nevertheless, a recent Penn State study shows only 23% of the landowners surveyed believe that the Clean and Green assessed values are too high.

Currently, landowners enroll in the voluntary Clean and Green program only in counties with recent reassessments. Many of Pennsylvania's 67 counties have not recently reassessed property values; so assessed values are lower than the use values available under Clean and Green. There were over 2 million acres (one-sixth of private forestland) enrolled in the Clean and Green program in 2000.

An issue with landowners is the so-called deferred income problem. Unlike farmers, many forest landowners only have timber income from their forestland once in the lifetime (when they harvest). However, they pay annual property taxes. Calculations show that even with the preferential assessment, the compounded value of the annual tax payments over an 80 to 100-year rotation is generally far greater than the revenues from timber harvests. Another landowner complaint is that actual forestland value can vary quite widely within the same county. However, the Clean and Green assessed rate within a county is the same for all landowners.

Many tax assessors and commissioners say that the assessed values derived from the current

use value formula are too low in their counties. Traditionally, property taxes fund schools and local governments. One particular concern among county officials is a recent amendment to the law. The amendment allows the land under a house, known as the "farmstead," to be assessed at Clean and Green rates and count toward the 10-acre minimum area. This provision is especially hard on rural counties where the fair market valuation for the "farmstead" acre comprised a significant portion of their tax revenues. The provision may also encourage developers to subdivide larger properties into 10-acre "mini-estates" that meet the size requirements for Clean and Green, but do not provide the kind of open space that the law was intended to protect. These "mini-estate" owners could pay considerably less in property taxes than people who own lower-value residences on smaller parcels in the same county. As large forestlands are subdivided, it often makes forest management more difficult, and many of the smaller parcels are essentially removed from the land base that supports Pennsylvania's forest products industry.

Another point of contention with Clean and Green is that the penalties for withdrawing from the program are not high enough compared to the potential profit from developing the land. Many government officials

believe that the penalties do little to prevent developers from purchasing land and enrolling it in the program until the time is right to develop the property. In this way, the program can reduce the cost of land speculation, potentially encouraging development.

As with any tax, there are complaints from all sides: county officials, landowners, rural counties, and urban counties. What is clear, though, is that there are issues to address with the Clean and Green program for forestland. One solution that can help is local tax reform at a larger scale, addressing school funding and income and sales taxes.

For more information about Clean and Green, request the free publication "Forest Finance #4: Understanding Forest Property Tax Assessment in Pennsylvania." The publication is available from the Pennsylvania Forest Stewardship Program by calling 1-800-235-WISE (toll-free), sending e-mail to RNRext@psu.edu, or writing to: Forest Stewardship Program, Forest Resources Extension, The Pennsylvania State University, 7 Ferguson Building, University Park, PA 16802.

The Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry and USDA Forest Service, in partnership with the Penn State's Forest Resources Extension, sponsor the Forest Stewardship Program in Pennsylvania.



70 Years Ago - June 24, 1932

NEW DEEP WELL TO SERVE SHAVERTOWN

Within the next week Dallas-Shavertown water company will connect its newly drilled deep well at Shavertown with water mains serving that community. The well was drilled to a depth of 528 feet.

The June issue of Wyoming Valley Motorist, official publication of Wyoming Valley Motor Club, contains a full page biographical sketch of Andy Thomas of Noxen, who has been the director of the motor club for the past seven years.

An early morning blaze kept Dallas, Shavertown and Harveys Lake fire companies busy for two hours and awoke the entire community damaged the beautiful home of A.I. Parks, Dallas to the extent of \$15,000.

60 Years Ago - June 26, 1942

STATIONS ESTABLISHED TO AID CASUALTIES

Dr. G.L. Howell, chief surgeon

in charge of First Aid and Casualty stations in District 9, comprising the Back Mountain area, has called a meeting of all local physicians at his home to lay plans for activities during all future blackouts.

A ten-thousand-gallon tank of Colas, road surfacing material, purchased by Dallas Borough Council for treatment of Dalals streets has been frozen by government order and has been placed in storage tanks of Mathers Construction Company at Trucksville.

Allan J. Kistler has succeeded Police Chief Ira C. Stevenson as Chief Air Raid Warden of Lake Township. Stevenson asked to be relieved due to his duties as head of the lake auxiliary police.

50 Years Ago - July 4, 1952

DALLAS TEENERS LEAD BICOUNTY JUNIOR LEAGUE

In the hardest fought game of the season East Dallas overpowered a very strong Jackson team to take top position in the Teenage League. Allabough was the winning pitcher for Dallas while Hoyt took the loss for Jackson.

Some of the merchandise donated to the Back Mountain Memorial Library Auction: Arvi; Electric Fan; Paint, one case, charcoal, six bags; auto seat covers (\$47.50 value); bacon and eggs; hot cake covers; bath salts; toilet water; bananas; frozen turkey; sump service;

ducklings.

Over 400 pounds of meat has been promised to the meat committee for the Back Mountain Memorial Library Auction. Cash donations of over \$100 will make more purchases possible.

40 Years Ago - June 28, 1962

KENNETH RICE TO OPEN 228 HOME DEVELOPMENT ON HIS ORCHARD VIEW FARM

A new residential development having more than 225 lots on the Kenneth Rice Farm will give free access to school buses and shorten the distance Dallas High School buses have to travel.

Jeris Jordan, Trucksville and Scott Alexander, Shavertown were each awarded the American Legion School Award presented by Daddow isaacs Post 667 for the outstanding boy and girl in the 8th grade at Dalals Junior High School.

Some of the items you could get at the ACME markets: club soda, 12 12-oz cans \$1; Miracle Whip, qt jar, 53¢; Nescafe Coffee, 10-oz jar, \$1.14; cantaloupes 3 for 65¢; Heinz Baby Foods 6 jars, 65¢.

30 Years Ago - July 6, 1972

MOBILE HOMES DELIVERED TO STATE PARK FOR VICTIMS OF AGNES FLOOD

The first 26 mobile homes of an expected 350-400 began ar-

riving at Frances Slocum state Park. These trailers will help to alleviate housing problems for flood victims whose homes were completely demolished or swept away in the Susquehanna River flood.

The Pennsylvania Department of Public Assistance began its program in the Back Mountain to distribute food stamps to flood victims.

U.S. Senators Hugh Scott and Richard S. Schweiker introduced an amendment to make \$200 million of additional federal money available for flood victims.

20 Years Ago - June 23, 1982

APPEAL HOLDS UP NEW SEAFOOD STORE

Construction of the Bankovich Seafood Store along Route 415 in Dallas may be held up while an appeal is filed in Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas. The appeal concerns possible improper advertising of the set-back variance granted by the Borough's Zoning Board.

Joe Kalinosky of the Kingston Twp. Lions Club is in charge of receiving both new and old goods for the Back Mountain Library Auction.

Herbert Quick of Harveys Lake, chairman of foreign languages department at Wyoming Seminary College Preparatory School, received an award marking his 25 years of service to the prep school.