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# OPINIONS

The Chowan Herald  
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## OUR VIEW

### Taxpayers must be wary of moneypits

When Chowan County Commission's Capital Improvement subcommittee met last week, the meeting offered a glimpse into the county's present and future priorities.

Due to Commission Chairwoman Patti Kersey's leadership, the CIP was created earlier this year as a means to prioritize the county's capital needs for the community for the next five years.

Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) lists projects, some ongoing, that may be funded for fiscal years 2020-24.

"Many factors were considered in developing this plan, including the current economic and fiscal climate and competing priorities and demands for county funds," according to letter written by County Manager Kevin Howard. "The most essential capital needs are those that address public health and safety issues and are therefore anticipated to be funded in the first year of this plan. This plan strives to find a balance between critical needs and other priorities and identifies funding sources necessary to meet those needs. The plan covers a five-year period, and the Board of Commissioners reviews the plan and adjusts as necessary each year."

Howard concluded by saying, "Chowan County places great importance on being fiscally responsible. This plan demonstrates our commitment to provide improvements and enhancements to our community."

Plan offers a laundry list of things that range from repairs to the Tri-County Animal Shelter to extensive upgrades and renovations to the Chowan County Jail. Repairs to Shepard-Pruden Library may be around the corner, perhaps accomplished within remainder of the 2019-20 fiscal year.

"I can see the future and it is expensive," said Commissioner Larry McLaughlin, who chairs the CIP subcommittee.

While the CIP shows what the county seeks to accomplish, it must be noted this is taxpayer money, so it must be spent wisely. Among the projects on the list is \$150,000 in repairs to the Swain Auditorium parking lot. During the major storms, water may runoff from the parking lot into the basement where the Senior Center is located.

Such runoff during Hurricane Matthew caused significant damage to the Senior Center in September 2016. Approximately 3 feet of floodwater broke through the double-glass doors on the East Church Street side of the building during the torrential rains brought by Matthew.

A few weeks ago, the senior center held a ribbon cutting — three years later — to pay tribute to the repairs and renovations that cost around \$875,000 — a figure that included architectural fees, tearing/replacing everything and much more. Policy-makers attributed the hold-up to bureaucratic red tape and associated issues arising from funding sources surrounding disbursements from insurance and Federal Emergency Management Agency claims.

The county only owns the Swain Auditorium part — the "back" half — of the former Edenton High School. A private developer owns the former classroom section, which is rented out as apartments. When the county "sold" the classroom section over a decade ago, the deed contained covenants and restrictions that require the county to make repairs to the Swain Auditorium in accordance with US Department of the Interior "standards for rehabilitation."

After the CIP subcommittee meeting, Commissioner Bob Kirby described Swain Auditorium as a "moneypit" for several reasons including how the standards dictate replacing rotten finishes "in-kind" so wooden window sashes which last 10-15 years — if they are not painted almost constantly — must be replaced with the same rot-prone wooden sashes and trim. And because the parking lot issue as it relates to basement flooding may be ongoing as determined by the path and strength of future hurricanes, the county will continue to be on the hook for expensive repairs.

Kirby noted that the time and money invested into Swain could be better spent elsewhere.

He said because the streets nearby significantly contribute to the runoff, the town of Edenton should fix these roads or be responsible for any future repairs associated with flooding.

With potential plans to build a new high school on the horizon, what need will there be for Swain auditorium as a venue for theatrical performances? With the Chowan Arts Council's focus on its new gallery on Water Street, there is less incentive for the CAC to be involved in booking shows for Swain, as it once did.

Maybe every family has a moneypit — sail boat or used sports car — governments have them too. But Chowan County's bottom line is not big enough to pay these ongoing expenditures so as to sustain the property indefinitely — taxpayers deserve better.

## READER WRITES

### Seeking information on fallen soldiers

Is anyone in this community related to Private 1st Class Earnest L. Twine, Company F, 120th Infantry, 30th Division, or Corporal Fred Bass, Company 1, 119th Infantry, 30th Division? Each served in World War I from this county and would have been born prior to 1900.

On Sept. 29, these men gave their lives to break the Hindenburg Line in France, thus hastening the end of WWI. North Carolina lost someone that day from 85 of its 100 counties.

In less than 30 days, a monument is being erected in France by the North Carolina National Guard to remember these brave soldiers of the 30th "Old Hickory" Division.

If you have any information on these individuals or are related, please visit this website and register: ncww1-monument.org

If you are not related, but had family who served in World War I, please visit the website and register. We are compiling a list of current family members of those who served.

JOHN MERRITT  
Wilmington

## LETTERS

Letters must include the author's name, address and daytime phone number (for verification purposes). Unsigned letters will not be considered. Submissions will be edited. Please keep letters to 350 words or less.

## SUBMIT LETTERS

Submit letters to Opinion Page Editor Miles Layton via email at mlayton@ncweeklies.com. Letters can also be dropped off at our office, 423 S. Broad St., Edenton.

## What good leaders do

"My grandson once asked me, 'Grandpa, were you a hero in the war?'"

Retired Major Richard Winters looked pensive as he called to mind a stream of memories.

"I told him, 'No, son, I was no hero. But I sure did serve in a company of heroes.'"

Notwithstanding his praise of his men, Major Winters definitely was a hero in World War II, as he led the men of Easy Company through the perils of D-Day, Brécourt, Carentan, Market Garden, Bastogne, Haguenau, and finally at Hitler's own Eagle's Nest in Berchtesgaden.

Every year at about this time, I play my DVD set of HBO's "Band of Brothers." This award-winning series — produced by Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks and adapted from Stephen Ambrose's 1992 book of the same name — started airing on Sept. 9, 2001, only two days before 9/11.

I revisit this story every year for several reasons. One is to remember the sacrifice made by thousands of American and Allied soldiers in World War II, especially in preparation for Veterans Day on 11/11.

I remember, too, my Army Air Force father-in-law Henry, who was a B17 top-turret gunner. His plane was shot down in January 1944, and he spent the balance of the war as a POW in Stalag XVIIB (yes, that one).

But this year, I watched Band of Brothers to remember what real leadership is. The timing couldn't have been better, as much of the old-fashioned and noble sense of leadership has been forgotten, or at least obscured.

Over a few nights last week, I watched Winters (who rose through the ranks from second lieutenant to major) lead, truly lead, his soldiers through various iterations of hellfire and brimstone.

In the pre-dawn hours before D-Day, dropped off course in the marshlands south of Sainte-Mère-Eglise, he guided wandering soldiers through the tangled darkness with a simple map and a tiny 1-inch compass.

At Carentan and Market Garden, he led his company head on into enemy fire. At Brécourt, he ran at the head through enemy-held trenches and artillery placements. He led from the front, never from behind, and certainly never from some soft, safe office far removed from peril.

He was shot at the Battle of Bloody Gulch, right above the ankle. He stayed ahead, limping, leading first "into the breach."

At Bastogne, he stayed in the damp cold, shivering with his soldiers under the traumatic barrage of German artillery fire. Shells were set to explode in the tree boughs — so not only were the men showered by shrapnel from the shells, but also by blasted tree shards raining down like knives.

The men, and (now) Capt. Winters, remained in their foxholes for a month, shivering from the northern Europe late December. They were without their winter gear, so quickly they had been ordered to the "Battle of the Bulge."

Winters, along with so many other officers, led his soldiers in truth, honor, patriotism and love. When a soldier was immobilized by fear to the point of traumatic blindness, he spoke with the young man patiently, and with dignity. The old meaning of "encouragement" is to renew courage by putting your own bravery in the heart of another, when his nerves are about to fail him.

That is exactly what Winters did,

## COLUMNIST



JONATHAN TOBIAS

time and time again.

Good, true leaders lead by moral example. They lead their company into danger and difficulty by going first in line.

In fact, this is the only time that real leaders go to the head of the line — just when the company is lined up to meet the enemy head on.

Fake leaders, on the other hand, avoid danger with excuses and complaints. They are fault-finding to the extreme.

Their motivation (and direction) stems from self-protection and self-promotion. Comfort and luxury — certainly not the poverty of Bastogne — are their priorities. "Leaders" such as these divide up humanity into black and white, "us vs. them" categories. Law, custom and order and traditions of civility are conveniently shaken and broken: Not for the sake of the nation, but for the sake of just one.

Fake leaders can often become famous and celebrated.

Conversely — and tragically — too many true leaders are never even noticed. There were hundreds, maybe thousands, of unrecorded heroic leaders in World War II alone who were cut down too soon, or simply not in the right place at the right time, to ever get the celebrity they richly deserved.

One such unknown heroic leader was 2nd Lt. Robert Hallden, the brave commanding pilot of my father-in-law's B17G Flying Fortress. It was a newish plane: The crew hadn't gotten around to naming and painting the aircraft (like "Memphis Belle"), so she was still known by her number, 42-37896.

On Jan. 11, 1944, 10 young men under Hallden's command took off from Molesworth Air Base in Cambridgeshire, England. Soon after leaving English air space, the protective fighter escort abandoned this ill-fated bomber group on account of the turbulent weather. So this brave bomber group — the First Division of the Fighting 303rd, called the (original) "Hell's Angels" — flew through 400 waves of fire from Luftwaffe aircraft and ground-based anti-aircraft flak. Despite this withering opposition, the group successfully attacked an aircraft factory in Oschersleben, Germany.

But this was a daylight raid in the most dangerous moment of the Allied air offensive against the Nazi war machine. That particular raid on that day became the most disastrous three and a half hours of the entire Allied air war. Over 42 B17s failed to return home to Molesworth that day.

Hallden's B-17G, number 42-37896, was one of these.

Soon after the bombing run, the craft flew into a hellish cloud of anti-aircraft fire. One of the engines burst into flames, and the plane began its roaring, fiery descent.

Hallden ordered his crew to abandon ship. Even in the tumultuous chaos of explosion, fire and smoke, and loss of control, he struggled mightily to keep the craft oriented so his men could jump clear of the B17's aft wings.

My father-in-law was the last one out, save for the pilot and copilot. Right before he jumped, the last thing Henry saw of the cockpit, through the inferno of fire and choking smoke, were two brave men, their lifeless hands still clutching the control wheel, despite being nearly sawn in two by the leaden torrent of machine

See TOBIAS, A5

## OTHER VOICES

### Douglass: From slave to statesman

He was one of the most revered Americans of the 19th century. His story of personal triumph — humble origins to national prominence — is equal to or greater than that of Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln or Ulysses Grant. He never became a politician, but he spoke to presidents as an equal.

His name is Frederick Douglass. Born a slave, Douglass never knew the exact date of his birth, never knew his father, never saw his mother after the age

of seven. This wasn't uncommon at the time. Slave owners often made a point of separating families. Breaking family bonds increased dependence on the slave owner.

Discipline was maintained through simple fear and destroying self-esteem. A slave could be punished for not



TIMOTHY SANDEFUR

working hard enough, but also for working too hard — or even for suggesting labor-saving ideas. Douglass experienced all of this and rebelled against it.

As a teenager, he taught himself to read. This created a desire for freedom. When his owner discovered this disturbing development, he sent him to live with a local farmer, Edward Covey, who made extra money breaking the will of unruly slaves.

Covey beat Douglass every week for six months, often for no reason. And it worked. Soon young Frederick gave up all hope of being free. "The dark night of slavery closed in upon me," he later wrote.

That all changed one hot August day in 1835. When Covey struck him, Douglass fought back. Where he found the courage, he couldn't say. The two men struggled until Covey stumbled away exhausted. Covey never laid a hand on Douglass again.

The teenage slave had stood up for himself. He considered this the most important lesson of his life. Years later, he would tell this story when urging black men to enlist in the Union Army to fight the Confederacy. "You owe it to yourself," he said. "You will stand more erect... and be less liable to insult... You [will be] defending your own liberty, honor, manhood, and self-respect."

Douglass made his escape from slavery in 1838, slipping into the North disguised as a U.S. Navy sailor. At any point along the rail journey, his flimsy cover could have been blown. Displaying a confidence he didn't actually feel, he bluffed his way past suspicious conductors and runaway-slave hunters.

Once in the North, he joined the radical abolitionist movement and was quickly recognized as a powerful speaker and writer. The movement's leader, William Lloyd Garrison, burned the Constitution at his July 4th speeches. In Garrison's view, it legally protected slavery and was therefore irredeemable.

But Douglass came to reject that. He believed that the Constitution was fundamentally opposed to slavery. "Interpreted as it ought to be interpreted," Douglass said, "the Constitution is a glorious liberty document."

Not surprisingly, Douglass was a strong supporter of the Republican Party — the new anti-slavery party — and of the Union cause in the Civil War.

Initially, he had doubts about Abraham Lincoln. He didn't think Lincoln was truly committed to ending slavery. But he warmed up to the Great Emancipator as the conflict wore on. Lincoln, on the other hand, always admired Douglass. "Here comes my friend Douglass," Lincoln said when he saw him at his second inaugural in 1865.

The Union victory ended slavery. But as the Democratic Party re-established itself in the South in the 1870s and '80s, a new kind of racial oppression arose in the form of Jim Crow laws and, even worse, widespread lynching.

This was a bitter pill for Douglass to swallow. But he never gave up the struggle and spent the last three decades of his life agitating for civil rights. "Freedom," he was fond of saying, "depended on three boxes: the ballot-box, the jury-box, and the cartridge-box."

For Douglass, it was self-evident that black Americans, as citizens, were entitled to full freedom and full legal protection. At a speech in 1893, when white hecklers began booing him, Douglass set his speech aside and spoke extemporaneously. "There is no Negro problem," he roared. "The problem is whether the American people have honesty enough, loyalty enough, honor enough, patriotism enough, to live up to their own Constitution."

He also believed that true liberty would only come for black Americans — as it

See SANDEFUR, A5