

Commentary

THE NEWS RECORD

Editorial

Be An Informed Voter At The Polls

The Democratic convention is behind us and the Republican convention will be held beginning next week. Across the nation, newspapers of all frequencies, serving communities and cities of all sizes will soon begin reminding people to vote. In past election years, The News Record has joined these other publications in urging people to register and vote.

This election year, we have a different message. While most of us in the media have considered it our responsibility to urge folks to vote, we have neglected to give the same amount of emphasis to another, and perhaps more important message. This message we send to voters — be an educated voter.

Many of us have entered the voting booth knowing for whom we intend to vote in the major races and most of us know for whom we will vote in the local races. But, many of us have also been guilty of voting for people of whom we know very little.

This election year, we urge you to know all the candidates. Know where they stand on all the issues. Understand how their positions will affect you, your neighbors, your county, your state, and the country as a whole. With our right to vote, comes the responsibility to know how our vote will affect ourselves and others.

Before you decide to pull a lever marking your choice on the ballot, make sure that you are making an informed choice and not a guess. There has always been a great deal at stake during election years, and now more than ever. The policies of the two major presidential candidates are as different from one another as any have ever been. Our national debt is greater than it has ever been. The need to take definitive action toward solving economic, environmental, and social problems is as urgent as it has ever been. The choices we make in the voting booth will determine how, when, and indeed if we are to address these problems.

Pick up a newspaper, visit the library, write for a copy of the candidates voting record, turn on the radio or television — the sources of information are abundant. In Madison and Buncombe counties, the local League of Women Voters will be happy to provide you with information. Visit the local headquarters of the candidates. On a local level, visit the candidates themselves. In short, there is no excuse for being uninformed. Our future is too important to trust to guess work. This election year, don't just know how you will vote, know why and know what your vote will mean.

Letters To The Editor

Many Misled

To the editor,
I would like to express some thoughts on the school issue that has split the Spring Creek Community, and caused a lot of untrue things to be said. Many people are being misled.

I feel the state and elected officials are on top of this problem, and personal interference by a small group has only caused more of a problem in this matter. We pay taxes, and I feel that is the way it should be handled, instead of hitting on people to take money out of their own pockets. Could it be that someone has a selfish or

personal reason for starting all this trouble?

I have read where they have had several heated meetings over this, but not once have I read or heard anybody mention prayer in this matter. If this were done, the Lord might show us the right direction to go. It might even unite the community. The Lord works in mysterious ways. Please pray about this matter.

Robert W. Mumblo
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Hot Springs.

Let's Remember The Handicapped

Marshall now has two spaces reserved for handicapped parking. This small step was long overdue in coming, and we applaud the board and Mayor Ward in particular for her tenacity in securing the spaces and for recognizing the need for these spaces.

Unfortunately, the Board of Aldermen has stopped short of making the businesses in town truly accessible to all our citizens and visitors.

We watched from the office window as a young man in a wheelchair tilted dangerously back to go over the curb onto the sidewalk this past Monday. He managed to clear the curb and get onto the sidewalk before we could offer assistance. As we were leaving the office, he asked, "Who do you see about getting some ramps around here?"

Redesigning the sidewalks or installing ramps is an expensive proposition but a necessary one. Marshall has taken the first step toward providing accessibility and we urge the board to consider other measures to make the town completely accessible.

More distressing than the lack of ramps is the attitude many of the visitors to downtown Marshall take in regards to the reserved spaces. Almost daily, we see people park in the spaces, get out of their cars and walk into a place of business. Certainly, there are people with hidden and temporary handicaps. We doubt that they exist in such numbers in Madison County. Most of these violators stay in the spaces a short time. Any time is too long to someone who must go through the difficulty of unloading a wheelchair, or walk several blocks using mechanical or artificial walking aids.

When we have business to do in Marshall, let us remember what the handicap parking spaces are for, be thankful that we don't need them, and drive around the block one more time.



Community Issues

Zoning Can Protect Homeowners From Chronic Worry

By YVETTE WESSEL

What is to many the dirtiest word in the English language? No, you're wrong. It isn't that one.

It's "zoning," a word with amazing powers to affect all kinds of people. Those who see it as an intrusion into private rights break out in a rash of its very mention.

Government officials, more often than not, hate it because it often stands between them and instant gratification. Its best friends are those who regard it as protection of their rights and planners who think of it as indispensable to rational development.

You wouldn't think a two-syllable word could pack such a wallop, but then "war" has only one.

Illustration: Mars Hill's recent zoning contest among the Planning and Zoning Board, the Mayor, the Aldermen, adjacent home owners, and a property owner requesting a commercial rezoning for a car wash on Route 213.

Let's begin at the beginning: the developer asked for guidance from Town Hall, followed it to the limit of his understanding, saved off a little hill, graded his property and then asked for a zoning change from residential to commercial.

The Planning Board had no choice but to turn the request down since it was patently not zoning, a legal no-no.

Neighbors of Mars Hill want the Planning Board to give the rezoning request a second look. The rezoning request was the only one of its kind in the county.

Those who followed the story will be familiar with the outcome. Several other owners of property on 213 proceeded to submit applications for rezoning to commercial thus removing the taint of illegality from the original request; the Aldermen ignored the Mayor, ignored the Mayor's request for guidance from the Planning Board and rezoned to commercial all those properties under consideration.

All the above was perfectly legal as our local laws are presently written. The developer cannot be faulted for trying nor for having been inadequately counseled; the neighboring property owners anxious to preserve the investments in their homes cannot be blamed for protesting. The Planning Board has only the power to recommend; the Mayor has no veto or voting power; the Aldermen have the prerogative to vote as they choose.

The outcome is no longer the issue by the process by which the decision was made has left emotional debris in its wake; fear for their property values and a sense of shattered faith on the part of the carwash's residential neighbors; a planning board confused as to its role; Aldermen out of sync on this issue with their Mayor.

Each fresh squabble of this type deepens the sense of powerlessness that already seems to pervade the county. But this kind of thing should not and does not have to happen. Nor would it be so constant if only the two candidates for rezoning and rezoning it were the county officials and the rezoning permitted to proceed to the Planning Board.

defined requirements such as buffering, setbacks, landscaping, permissible grades on slopes, height and size limitations, required revegetation of gouged and cleared land without attention paid to impact on neighboring sites, whether they be private homes or businesses—cannot be defined as progress.

Sight lines are an important consideration in Madison County and should be kept firmly in mind. The desecration of a view may prevent construction of a potential tax-producing home development.

Planning defines progress and it defines growth. Progress and growth do not have to be disruptive. There is a proper place for retail establishments, for fast-food restaurants, for corporations, and, yes, for carwashes. There certainly is a way to ensure attractive commercial development.

There is also a way to protect homeowners from chronic worry about unexpected changes in their environment.

What is needed is a sensible plan achieved by weighing on the scale the interest of all residents and with a clear vision of what Madison County wants itself to be in the years ahead.

What is needed is serious attention paid to that plan by the powers that be. What is needed are zoning enforcement officers at the county and town level whose job it is to keep tabs on violators and report those violations to the authorities.

Planning boards must be taken seriously and given more teeth. It may not be generally known that zoning is a part of the Plan that

For zoning to work, a majority of the public must be convinced that it is in its own best interest. Since best interest always comes down to the bottom line on a ledger, the public must come to the realization that maintenance of property values and esthetic considerations have monetary value.

It must be willing to set goals, define the direction in which it wants development to go, where it wants it to go, give local government the tools with which to stick to those goals and resist the temptation to reap short-term profits at the expense of long-range benefits.

Surely it is time for Madison County residents to assess the economic advantages of preserving natural beauty. God has done a splendid job with our landscape, but two glaring examples demonstrate what man has done to mar it.

The Marshall Bypass has become the accepted standard in conservation for unbelievably ugly commercial development. Carl Eller Road in Mars Hill runs the Bypass a close second.

It is no wonder that automobile passengers, who have no qualms about throwing trash out their windows, have no more respect for what they see than we have.

No one wants more of the above, yet what is to stop the trend unless the county comes in force with strict zoning.

Accepting the discipline that zoning enforces brings is difficult and especially so in a county in which this one alone is a bastion of esthetic preservation in the South.