

VIEWPOINTS

Lentz helped others, passed the test

While he left us early, Bill Lentz had a life well lived. Bill and Betty were high school students of mine. They were two fine young people. At the memorial service many of Bill's friends talked about his golf and his sense of humor. In all the high school students I had over the years Bill was the one I thought could have made it on the PGA tour. He had an even temper, never got upset over a shot gone astray, and he enjoyed playing with anyone who loved the game, although they didn't have a chance of winning. Bill chose a different route for his life's work and he was a successful businessman; however, Bill did not judge his life by the amount of money he made. He judged it by the contribution he made to his fellow human beings and those he influenced. There is no greater legacy than a life devoted to helping others; Bill met the test. We shall all miss our friend, but we can take comfort in knowing that the One in charge of all of us said, "Well done, thy good and faithful servant."

A View from the Country

Raz Autry



All churches are having a hard time meeting their budgets; people simply do not have a lot of money. We can see that at our peach orchard. On the upbeat side of the issue I truly think people who attend church give what they feel they can afford. Unfortunately, that never seems to be enough as far as those in charge see it.

Ireni and I joined the Methodist church 57 years ago. The bishops moved the ministers every four years. If a church had a minister they loved, they only kept him four years; if one wasn't the congregation's favorite minister, they still loved him for four years. When we got new bishops, we began to change that practice.

Some of our ministers stayed put for years; however, bishops come and go, and the one we

have now is not one of my favorite, which doesn't mean he will not sleep good tonight because of my opinion. He is not a realist. Just because he orders the district's superintendents to obey his instructions doesn't mean the congregations are going to obey them. As Christians we are responsible for our own deeds - the bishop or anyone else is not the go-between for our God and us. Politics are politics and they are as prevalent in the church as they are in all parts of society. The present bishop didn't get his position because he was the best candidate. I know several pastors who would take a more sensible approach than he does with congregations. He got appointed because he was a better politician. That, for those who disagree, is how it is done.

My parting thought: In class the teacher was trying to get the students to think. She asked if the pilgrims were alive today what would they be famous for. One little smart aleck said, "Their age."

We Get Letters

Lost warm, fuzzy feeling

Our home was burglarized on July 14. We have now, after living in this county over seven years and never a problem, had to put in a security system and chains and locks on our gate. Today I talked to the sheriff's department to see what leads they had or if the fingerprints they dusted came back. I was told that they had attempted to lift the prints but for some reason they were no good. I'm not a detective but I'm angry at myself for not taking a picture of the prints because they sure looked pretty clear to me! The footprint on our back door was also very clear (about a size 12!). As I sit here today thinking about my conversation

with the detective, I am very disturbed. He said they had 20 break-ins over the weekend? About two out of every 10 cases gets solved? Does any of this info bother any other Hoke residents? Is there any preventive action going on in Hoke County? I, myself, do not have a "warm, fuzzy feeling" anymore!

Dorothy Patton
Lumber Bridge

Letters policy

The News-Journal welcomes letters to the editor and encourages readers to express their opinions.

Letters must be signed and include an address and phone number. The street address and phone number will not be

published, but are required so we may verify authenticity. The name of the writer and, in some cases, the town the writer is from will be published at the end of the letter.

We are not able to publish letters that are essentially thank-you cards.

We reserve the right to edit letters for grammar, as well as those that exceed 300 words. We will not publish letters that we consider to be in poor taste or libelous. In some cases we may add an editor's note as a postscript when we believe a correction, explanation or amplification is warranted. We may also, at our discretion, limit the number of times an individual writer may submit a letter for publication.

Time to plan well for affordable housing

By ANNE EHLERS

The shadow of the housing crisis is still looming large over North Carolina. With next year's foreclosure starts projected at above 70,000 and more than two million North Carolinians still lacking quality, affordable housing, the challenge seems insurmountable at times. But, while challenges test our collective spirit, they often inspire innovative and progressive solutions.

Witness the recent decisions of the state legislature to extend and expand our state's Foreclosure Prevention Program, add greater protections for homeowners and homebuyers against predatory real estate practices, and create a statewide Sustainable Communities Task Force to promote connections between affordable housing, transportation, and economic development.

In the same fashion, local municipalities are finding that the time is ripe to address the issue of affordable housing and the concept of providing a range of affordable choices throughout their counties. In Raleigh, the city is revamping its development code and has put together a group of local experts and stakeholders to investigate ways to provide incentives for developing affordable and mixed-income housing. In Charlotte, after recent heated community battles over proposed affordable housing developments, city leaders are working to rewrite the city's "locational" policy that guides where assisted multifamily housing can be built.

While it is heartening to see affordable housing taking a higher profile in the public and political consciousness, there

remains a great need for local leaders to be bold in their decision-making. It is not enough to create policies that dictate only the location for certain types of affordable housing, as with Charlotte's locational policy. Leaders need to look at the issue of housing policy holistically and as part of a greater economic development strategy. They need to create policies that promote the development of quality housing choices in areas where they are needed - near transit, jobs, and in areas where little affordable housing is available or few safe, quality housing choices exist. Housing is inextricably connected with a community's economic wellbeing, its public health, the welfare of its schools, its environmental impact, and its overall social harmony.

There is little reason to avoid affordable housing developments and every reason to support, encourage and invest in their growth. The days of unattractive, obvious developments are long gone. The issue of appearance is irrelevant as today's affordable housing is thoughtfully designed to complement the existing community. Developers and property managers have set the highest standards for tenant screening and maintenance and research shows these developments have little to no effect on home values. Residents of affordable housing include seniors living on social security, persons with disabilities, teachers, police officers, nursing assistants and young professionals just starting out.

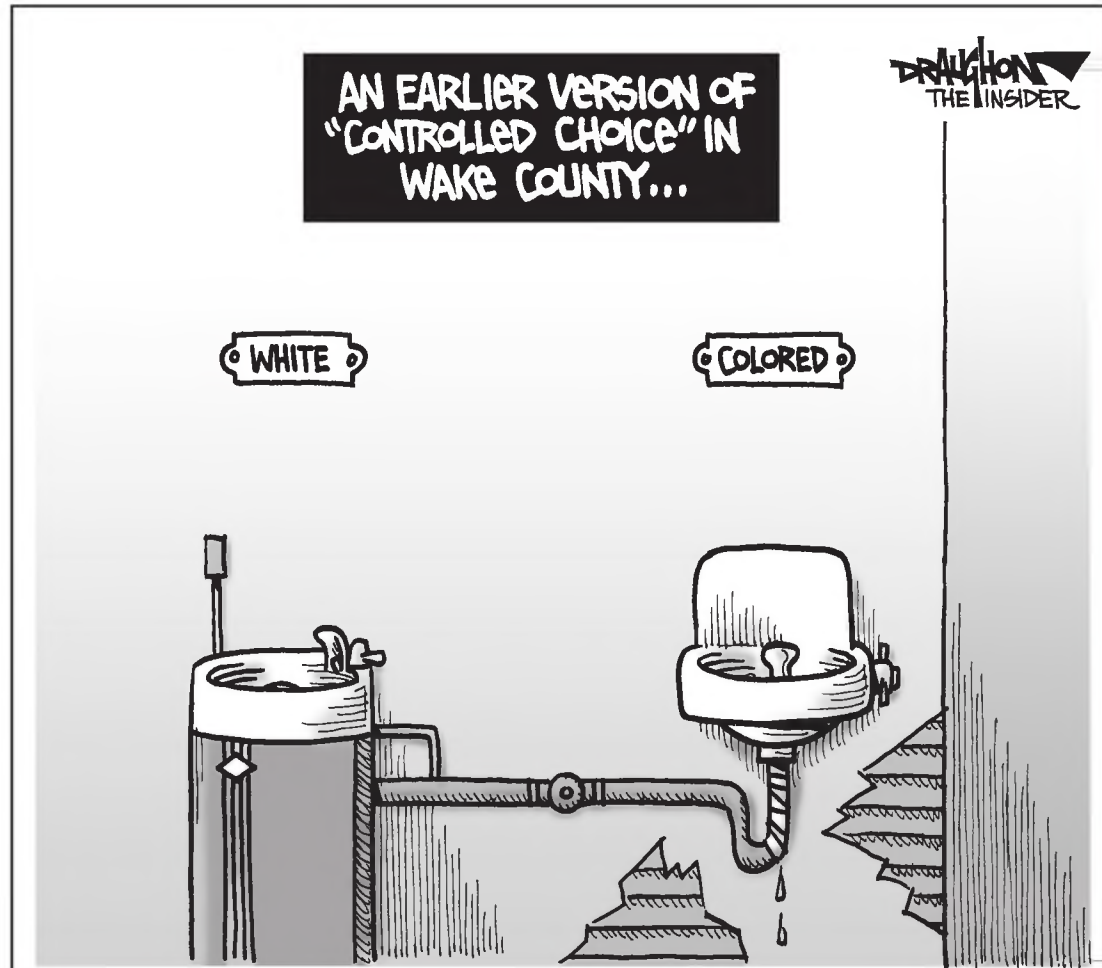
Indeed, such developments have proven to be significant assets in community redevelopment. Investing millions

of dollars in new, attractive and well-maintained developments entices other businesses and organizations to put down roots in the community as well. And, much like the domino effect, the community begins to thrive. When affordable housing is utilized as part of a comprehensive community development strategy, it helps to provide stability and economic opportunity for all.

For these and other reasons, policy makers should consider several strategies that stimulate development of affordable housing - especially in expensive, high-growth areas. One option is for counties to purchase additional land when buying space for new schools and then sell it to developers for affordable rental housing. Another option is to utilize a transit-oriented development strategy and require affordable housing to be built in proximity to transit stations. Finally, providing subsidies to assist in purchasing land in more expensive areas will help make financing with existing subsidy sources possible.

The bottom line: All North Carolinians (regardless of status or income) deserve a safe, affordable place to lay their heads at night. Happily, well-developed, comprehensive locational policies ensure that affordable housing is an asset to its community, provides economic opportunity to its residents and gives people the choice about where they live. All that we lack is the political will to make this "win-win" solution reality on a large scale.

Anne Ehlers is the Development and Communications Coordinator at the North Carolina Housing Coalition.



Computer consolidation might still be problem

By SCOTT MOONEYHAM
Capitol Press Association

Earlier this month, Gov. Beverly Perdue sent a memo around to state agency heads urging their cooperation with an effort to consolidate state computer networks.

"The goal is to move aggressively toward an improved IT (information technology) infrastructure that will lower costs, reduce complexity and redundancy, improve the utilization of resources and increase security," Perdue wrote.

She also wants to create a one-stop website for residents and businesses conducting business with the state, a sort of port of entry for anyone conducting Internet transactions with the state.

Perdue's plan is laudable. But she's wading into waters where the state hasn't enjoyed a lot of success.

The governor's description of her goal could have easily been taken from former State Controller Robert Powell when, in 2008, he launched a new payroll and personnel computing system called BEACON.

The effort was beset with problems, both of and not of its doing.

Even before the new system was put in place, some agencies opted out, a move that the Easley administration allowed.

BEACON hadn't been up and operating for long before thousands of state employees were phoning into a call center to complain that they'd been shorted on their paychecks. Hundreds more complained to the state workers' union, the State Employees Association of North Carolina. Workers from Dorothea Dix psychiatric hospital became so upset that they were nearly arrested while demanding to see the state's top healthcare brass.

In some cases, the system made mistakes computing pay; in others, agencies hadn't been following state rules in tallying overtime. When the new system uniformly enforced those rules,

some workers weren't happy.

As problems began to subside, a glitch caused errors to show up on state workers' IRS W-2 forms. The state had to reprint W-2s for 17 percent of the state workforce whose pay was overseen by the system.

But transition to the BEACON payroll system was relatively smooth compared to some other, earlier IT disasters in state government.

The public schools' NC WISE student information system was still beset with bugs and delays eight years after the installation began. It never really lived up to its promise.

When the state decided to go with a new Medicaid claims processing vendor, the largest information technology contract in state history became bogged down with delays and

contract disputes. The state eventually fired the new vendor and started anew.

The problem with information technology contracting in state government is twofold.

Over the years, state agencies grew their own information technology operations. Then they looked to protect that turf.

The creation of the state Office of Information Technology Services was one attempt to get around the turf protection. Perhaps Perdue's effort will further undo it.

But she may find herself running into the other problem when government does IT.

State workers overseeing the projects often don't have the same level of expertise as the vendors they hire. With the uneven tilt, the state can be shortchanged.



The News-Journal

Published every Wednesday by Dickson Press, Inc.

Robert A. Dickson, President • Anne Dickson Fogleman, Secretary/Treasurer
119 W. Elwood Avenue, Raeford, NC 28376 • (910) 875-2121

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Friday 12 Noon

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