

Planning board's work just ignored

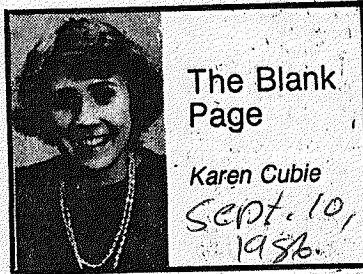
I wish someone could tell me why the city of Taunton has a planning board when no one pays any attention to it.

Unlike the city council, planning board members are not politicians. They don't meet in front of a camera, and showmanship is not part of their game.

The Taunton Planning Board doesn't take its charge lightly.

Every other Thursday evening the seven members rush home from work, wolf down dinner, and hurry to City Council Chambers for the 6:30 p.m. meeting. They hold two hearings, listen to the opinions of opponents and defenders of projects, approve or disapprove condominium and subdivision proposals, and, when asked, make recommendations on matters referred to them by city council.

The meetings last anywhere from four to six hours an evening, but the biweekly sessions aren't the board's only concern. These seven members also make on-site visitations to view the various situations for themselves.



The Blank Page

Karen Cubie
Sept. 10,
1986

It's frustrating to attend the lengthy, complex, and often dull meetings, and then to watch the referrals made be ignored time and time again. It makes you wonder if the city council ever reads the board's reasons for the referrals, or if they just want to be able to say they asked for one.

Why does the city elect planning officials if their opinions are constantly overruled? What are they there for if their recommendations hold no weight?

A few weeks ago the Whittenton Heights Neighborhood Association appeared before the planning board to request the rezoning of an

area in the neighborhood from urban residential to suburban residential.

After reviewing the situation and the reasons for the request, and listening to the opponents and defenders of the request, the planning board voted to give the council a negative recommendation.

The new Master Plan has not yet been completed, they gave as the reason for their vote, and since the board had previously voted against rezoning an area in order to allow condominium development, it felt bound to vote against rezoning an area in order to prevent condominium development.

Last week the matter appeared before the city council and the rezoning request was granted, in spite of the board's recommendation.

At this point it is impossible to say whether the council's action was the best course for the city or not. But it seems the decision has less in its favor than against it.

As a *Gazette* editorial stated last

Friday, "The Taunton Planning Board presented this city council with the best way out of the dilemma caused by the petition for rezoning the Whittenton Heights land from urban residential to suburban.

"The board noted that zoning changes could hardly be made in an intelligent manner right now because the new Master Plan still is being formulated. That undoubtedly will lead to new zoning designations along with a new zoning ordinance.

"The planning board's recommendation on this petition was to take no action until the Master Plan is in place."

Last Thursday, the planning board heard a request for another recommendation from George Benjamin, owner of Benjamin's Restaurant and the developer of the proposed Indian Ridge luxury condominiums planned to overlook the Segregansett Country Club.

The board was concerned Benjamin's 3.79-acre project, planned to hold 48 one- and two-bedroom units, would be too dense. Benjamin seemed worried and frustrated with the thought that his already expensive project wouldn't get a positive recommendation.

Somehow, I didn't share his concern.

"It doesn't matter what the planning board tells you," I wanted to reassure him. "This is just a routine referral. The city council will toss the recommendation aside, look around the room to count project defenders and opponents, and vote on the basis of the human evidence set before their very eyes."

"Don't work so hard," I wanted to tell Chairman Lincoln A. DeMoura when he struggled to explain the board's perspective to the frustrated developer.

"Don't think so much," I muttered to Clerk Thomas L. MacDonald.

As it turned out, the board did approve the idea of building condominiums at that location.

But if the board had opposed the idea, he wouldn't have anything to worry about.

"You'll get your condos, George," I wanted to reassure him. "No one listens to the planning board anyway."

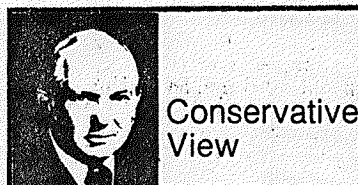


1986. RICHMOND TIMES DISPATCH NEWS AMERICA SYNDICATE BRACKINS

Hard times loom for legal services

WASHINGTON — What's with the government's Legal Services Corporation? Sad to say, nothing good. This well-intentioned program faces severe cuts in its appropriation. It has lost the confidence of key senators. Old conflicts remain unresolved. It's not a

repossession. The defendant would arrive in court, bewildered by the proceedings, and often would wait half a day for his case to be called. Then it was over in a few seconds. Judgment would be entered for the merchant; the furniture would be attached and repossessed, and



Conservative View

pool of loan money for the poor. Other activists have involved the LSC in "national advocacy coalitions." The 1975 act absolutely forbids political partisanship and legislative lobbying, but the provision has been widely abused.

In its brief existence, the LSC