

Commissioners' silence sent a strong message

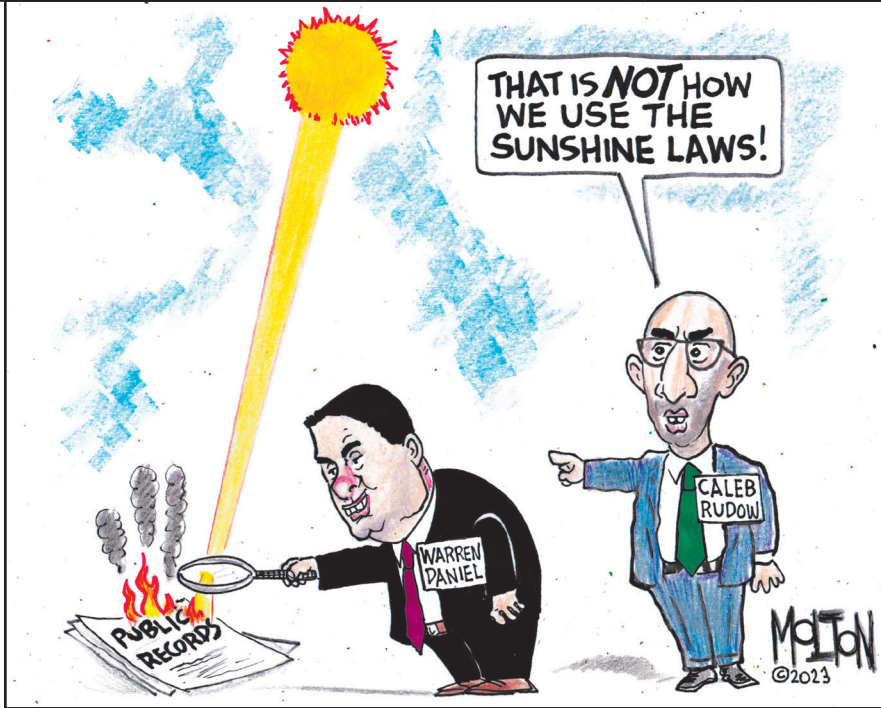
We hope the Buncombe County commissioners listened carefully to the messages of the many college- and high school- age people at their Dec. 5 public hearing on the rezoning of Biltmore Farms land for further development. Their words courageously called out the complicity in an ongoing atrocity. But their voices carried an even more powerful message: *We are angry. We are sad. We are in despair at and in this world.*

These young people and many elders, too, see before them a disaster unfolding. They see the unnecessary killing and mistreatment of innocent Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank. They see world governments looking the other way and our government enabling the disaster with words and weapons. They see a world that will likely be unlivable in their lifetime and that of their children. They see a system that bows to corporations and neglects people. They see elected leaders who appear not to care. They see blank faces, technical rules and obscure procedures. They see a system that lacks authentic engagement.

Are they radical? You bet they are. Do they shout, chant and bang pots for hours outside their meeting? You bet they do. They must, as there seems to be no other way to make their voices heard. And even then, they are silenced or pushed aside as inappropriate.

Like all of us, these young people want to see true democracy, where-in there are systems and places for active engagement. Unfortunately, the commissioners' meeting was not an example of that. Public hearings are a farce. After the comment period where so many spoke passionately, the commissioners had no discussion, and they offered no evidence or authentic rationale for their decision. Their silence sent a strong message. Public hearings are required, but decisions are made secretly, and opinions of citizens don't really matter.

What are young people learning about government from these practices? What are they learning about the integrity of elected officials? Where, leaders, are these young people to engage? What, leaders, are they to do? We know what they will say: They should engage actively in the processes of government. Be on a board or commission. Write letters to the editor. Join a political party. We know very well that institutions marginalize certain voices and use technical rules and prescribed procedures to limit engagement. The young people at the meeting on Dec. 5 learned that lesson.



CARTOON BY RANDY MOLTON

What we learned from our research into how the 2020 tax incentive deal for Pratt & Whitney came down with so little public knowledge or engagement is that economic development deals, among other decisions, are deliberated about and negotiated out of the public eye. Consequential discussions are held behind closed doors. Landowners, corporations, the Chamber of Commerce and elected officials are more important than the general public.

And, to truly engage, a citizen must be *very* knowledgeable, must be able to navigate the morass of bureaucratic workings and must stay with the process for the long haul. Where do college or high school students learn any of this? What efforts do county officials make to educate the public, especially young people, about how to engage in the political process?

The Buncombe County commissioners should be happy that 30 angry voices engaged at their Dec. 5 meeting. They should be proud that an additional 100 motivated people spent hours in the cold outside yelling and banging pots. Because these days, that is what democratic engagement has to look like.

— *Melody Shank and Anne Craig*
Retired educators and Reject Raytheon AVL organizers
Swannanoa and Asheville, respectively

Choose how your next 525,600 minutes will unfold

“Five hundred twenty-five thousand, six hundred minutes. How do you measure, measure a year? In daylight, in sunsets, in midnights, in

cups of coffee, in inches, in miles, in laughter, in strife.”

— *from Jonathan Larson's "Seasons of Love"*

Each year we are given 525,600 minutes. How will you measure this new year?

I am brand-new to Asheville, so I am looking forward to spending my 525,600 minutes exploring all that this great community has to offer: the creativity of the arts and music, the fabulous variety of good food, the beauty of nature, the diversity of the people here — my 525,600 minutes will be full of goodness!

We stand at the threshold of a brand-new year. Unconsciously, many of us repeat the same year over and over because we do not intentionally change the pattern of our thinking and doing. Will you walk through the threshold of a revolving door or of an evolving door? Will you relive the past 525,600 minutes, or will you live a brand-new 525,600 minutes? The choice is yours.

We choose how the next 525,600 minutes will unfold by setting clear, conscious intentions. We can consciously choose to *not* be at the effect of our past and instead, consciously choose to be the cause of our intended future, which then pulls us toward it with magneticlike attraction.

Your best year ever is not somewhere out there in a far-off future. The life you've always wanted is within reach right now — the seed of it lies in the soil of your soul. Join us at Center For Spiritual Living Asheville on

Editor's Note

The *Xpress* team is taking the next week off, which means this is our final issue of the year. Our annual Humor Issue hits newsstands on Wednesday, Jan. 3, 2024. Happy New Year!

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