

Talking points

Readers offered views on downtown, infrastructure, plastic bans and more



Xpress readers engaged with a wide range of local issues in 2023 — from concerns about downtown Asheville to infrastructure priorities, a possible single-use plastic bag ban, education issues and more. Here’s a look at some of the topics that sparked letters to the editor, commentaries and online comments.

INFRASTRUCTURE PRIORITIES

The city’s water crisis — which began Dec. 24, 2022, and left thousands of city water system customers without water, some till Jan. 4 — was top of mind for some readers at the start of the year. In a letter published Jan. 4, Leonard Nickerson of Swannanoa wrote: “Time to put a hiatus on new buildings and structures and talk to experts on what the infrastructure can handle. I have a wife in CarePartners on Sweeten Creek Road with no water. Really don’t think this problem will help her and all the other patients.”

And after a July 19 *Xpress* article about an independent review committee’s report on the outage, Asheville reader Carole Schaefer, who lost water for almost a week, commented: “It’s time for the city to consider the consequences of their decisions, check their priorities and do what’s right now.”

Potential infrastructure improvements of another sort spurred readers’ reactions after the Tourists baseball team’s ownership group, at the insistence of Major League Baseball, threatened to leave town if a \$30 million funding commitment for McCormick Field renovations wasn’t secured.

In a Feb. 1 letter, Trish Howey of Leicester declared: “I can’t even get my head around \$30 million or how we



IF YOU UPGRADE IT: Readers weighed in on the prospect of McCormick Field renovations in 2023. Photo courtesy of the City of Asheville

can find a way to get it, but I’m pretty sure there’s enough people with that kind of money to preserve our honored tradition in our wonderful city!”

Countered online commenter indy499: “City taxpayers are tired of paying for things used by many who have no financial skin in the game.”

By July, the funding deal had come together with commitments from the City of Asheville, Buncombe County and the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority.

EYES ON DOWNTOWN ASHEVILLE

Concerns about crime and cleanliness in downtown Asheville, reported in an *Asheville Watchdog* series and

via *Xpress* reporting, prompted multiple letters, including one from Black Mountain reader Susan A. Stone.

“I felt a great deal of sadness reading about the increase in vagrancy, crime and homelessness in Asheville,” wrote Stone in the March 22 letter. “I have lived in this area for 24 years and have loved Asheville, but it has changed. It’s no longer the delightful and quirky place it used to be, with its street musicians, wonderful music and little shops. It’s full of traffic, chain stores and tourists.”

By April 20, a downtown safety initiative had been announced, with a May 1 start date.

mer Asheville City Council member and Buncombe County GOP chair Carl Mumpower remarked: “When the personal accountability of the recipient is removed from any helping equation, that effort is doomed to fail — if not now, then soon.”

And in a March 29 letter, Asheville reader Vikki Dibble wrote: “It is blatantly obvious to me that there are many homeless advocates and agencies in such a small city, yet rarely do I read about collaboration and true problem-solving for the social issues among these agencies. This is hard for me to believe, yet the first recommendation from the most recent homeless study done for the city/county was the lack of collaboration.”

MONUMENTS AND MORE

A June 21 commentary about the deconstructed Vance Monument (whose ultimate fate remains unresolved) by retired UNC Asheville history professor Milton Ready sparked spirited debate online, along with several letters to the editor.

Wrote Ready: “Frankly, I miss the presence of Zebulon Vance’s granite obelisk, a poignant local landmark on Pack Square for over a century. ... Moreover, I wish Pack Square hadn’t been historically cleansed by removing such a visible reminder of its past. Instead, perhaps Asheville and Buncombe County should follow the British model of ‘retaining and explaining’ controversial monuments and statuary.”

But in a July 5 letter, Weaverville reader Mouse Wilson countered: “What Mr. Ready fails to grasp is the idea that Confederate monuments were intimidation tactics when they were constructed in the first place. For what other military engagement in history has the losing side been commemorated in such ways?”

Expanding on the conversation Aug. 2, retired lawyer Peter Robbins of Marshall focused on place names — and specifically Asheville, named for early North Carolina Gov. Samuel Ashe, who, like Vance, was a slaveholder. In the year’s most widely read Opinion piece, Robbins wrote: “I’ll bite the bullet and propose that, to the extent practicable, we really should look into changing some of those odious slaveholder names, if we can accomplish the task in a cost-tolerable fashion. Asheville wasn’t always called Asheville, you know. Marshall wasn’t always Marshall.”



CARL MUMPOWER

SEARCHING FOR SOLUTIONS

Readers also reflected on local efforts to understand and address homelessness. In a Feb. 22 letter, for-

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