

LOOSE THREADS: PART 1

by
Webmaster

[Note: I began this piece on January 14, 2013 and am returning to it on March 6. It could in fact be a sort of diary and thus never end. But it probably makes more sense to wrap it up in the next day or so, post it, and return to the remaining threads in one or more follow-up pieces.]

Gee, it seems like we have a lot of time on our hands! And there are a number of loose threads out there, so why not start working on some of them?

I'm the webmaster (not in caps). It would be more accurate to say "a webmaster", since there are lots of us, but "the webmaster" just sounds nicer to me. I began to take the name seriously about a month or so ago, as I was wading into the weeds of the battle against Costco (www.stopcostcogas.org), functioning as Webmaster of The Stop Costco Gas Coalition (SCGC). [Bet everybody else in the SCGC Coordinating Committee (SCGC-CC) regrets the day they took THAT fatal step - asking me to be webmaster!]

But what the heck; I've been webmaster for years now, just at another node in the global web: (www.educationalassistance.org). It's a great job: no salary or benefits, unlimited expenses (no expense account however), and it's a lifetime appointment - I serve me until I die!

Anyway, where were we? Oh yes, lots of time and plenty of loose ends. Consider these:

(a) Lots of time, because the elections have been over for a while, we have already fallen off the fiscal cliff, and because all of us on the SCGC-CC (dontcha just love those acronyms?) have filed all the documents we had to file by the January 15 deadline. [Whole wide opening with that last word, but I digress - or am tempted to...] So what else is there to do?

(b) Wait and strategize: When I began this piece (1/14/13), we were waiting for planning staff to read all the various submissions about S-2863 and make a recommendation about Costco's application. And we were strategizing as to how to get the various media involved, so we could get the broader public involved. There was also the matter of how to apply pressure to entities that were either working against us (and for Costco), like the County Executive, or entities, like the Board of Education, that insisted on sticking their heads in the sand and not even having the moral fortitude to state a position on the issue of health risks implicit in the proposed Costco station.

Since then the planning staff has reported a recommendation of denial (based on concerns about health!). The Planning Board has read everything, held a very long public hearing, and decided (3:2 and 2:3) to recommend denial based on a majority concern about compliance with the Wheaton Sector Plan, but not recommend denial based on concerns about health risks. Talk about muddled victories! So the process marches on. The OZAH hearings (sorry for all the

acronyms, but I'm way down in the weeds, so if you care, go to the SCGC website for clarification) that were supposed to begin on March 11 are now postponed and scheduled to start on April 26.

So now we have gone off another cliff (Sequestration) and again have time to wait and strategize. Are we going anywhere? Or is this just a story of endless circling until common sense simply gets worn down and people say "Whatever"?

c. For me, personally, this has been a very interesting learning experience. Eclectic, but interesting - because I love to learn. I've learned a LOT about how some laws do - and do NOT - work for the good of our society. Will pick up that thread after the matter of S-2863 is resolved; assuming that it is resolved before I "shuffle off this mortal coil". By that time I will have even more "insights" into how we ought to amend a LOT of laws - and pass some new legislation.

I learned how to read an additional pile of complex (and sometimes boring) documents; the skill wasn't new (that was my job for almost forty years as a scientist/educator), but the topics were. Reading (and demolishing) Costco's Land Use Report was fun. Learning how to read a Traffic Impact Analysis was challenging, but coming to the point of understanding why the TIA could not show Costco's proposal would have any negative impacts was enlightening in that it allowed me to understand how the many TIAs filed in Montgomery County since I have lived here have shown no negative impacts of the various proposed developments and yet we all now sit in traffic out the wazoo.

I've also learned a number of new tricks about how to operate a website, including how to try (unsuccessfully) to raise money for a cause, set up blogs, etc.

Getting into the blogosphere has been a VERY interesting trip. It opens all sorts of options for influencing public opinion. Or at least deluding oneself that one is influencing public opinion. It has reminded me yet again why I have so little faith that "the public" actually wants to understand anything more complex than "cheap gas" or "NIMBY". But then, I'm just a cranky old civic activist.....

Now that I've mentioned "old", it seems time to wrap up this piece with some pithy comments as to the immortal words I am penning here (well, pecking actually). They may be good (or even better than that) but only an idiot would see them as immortal. All our digital advances have allowed us to write and publish oodles of brilliant prose, while making it a virtual certainty that nothing we write will be "available" to anyone even 10 years from now.

When I do shuffle off..., my website(s) will cease to exist (once the two year contract with Hostmonster runs out) and essentially all of my digital wisdom will be gone (unless someone has chosen, by virtue of a serious defect in judgement, to quote me at a www node that survives - or heaven forbid to print out one of my pieces and file the hardcopy somewhere).

And that is EXACTLY how it should be. We are all polluting the entropic universe with our drivel. It is best that the drivel not survive. We are wasting energy doing all this (and thus hastening the arrival of the final darkness), but at least we

seem to have stumbled on a way to do it that minimizes the savage wasting of trees.

The ramblings of an old man? Perhaps. But one of the many loose threads to which my title refers. And remember, this is just Part I.

MRA, 3/7/13