

FAIRFIELD IS HEMORRHAGING- COMMUNITY DISINTEREST IS NOT A TOURNIQUET

Perhaps I fell for a pandering, touchy-feely TV moment as I was moved when a moderator of a recent presidential debate paused halfway to invite all candidates to the stage. On camera and off mic, there was press the flesh face time and cordiality. I have been in the wings when titans have waltzed on stage and that night I know I saw some very human moments.

It served as a crucial reminder that we must never underestimate the tragedy of internecine war; a mutually destructive conflict within a nation. Furthermore, leaders must exhibit a sort of comity; the extension of courtesies to others by recognizing the validity of how others attend to and govern their affairs. The networks chose wisely in providing us structured scrutiny of candidates and thus contributed to the knowledge of democracy's greatest asset, us.

Thus, let's look at the painful budgetary decisions facing the city council that we have long known were coming. During campaigns, we demanded neither structured debates nor detailed plans. Taking nothing from the candidates, our apathy is underscored by the fact that the winning councilman garnered the support of a little over seven thousand out of nearly seventy thousand possible registered voters. Hearts and hearths are now on the budget ledger line as consumers and creators of resources chose silence.

Walt Kelly created the Pogo cartoon and quipped, "We have met the enemy and He is us." We drove the sub prime roller coaster, rightly asked for more police, did not make enough progress in terms of development based revenues and resoundingly defeated each revenue-raising measure. So here we, not just the council, are.

In large part our elected officials did their job. They have been clear regarding building their team, fighting crime, stimulating business, broadening the tax revenue base and serving the needs of our teens. They are trying to do exactly what they said they would do. The present proposal is for a three percent cut in fire and safety and more than twenty-three percent cuts in Public Works and Community Services.

Perhaps half of our budget shortfall should be managed by shared sacrifice predicated upon the fact that all department budgets must have at least a few percentage points of fat and inefficiency which when cut results in no serious loss of manpower or mission. This leaves the other 50% of the shortfall as discretionary cuts by the council in accordance with their elected mission after consideration of thoughtful input from all.

When one makes draconian cuts in community services and public works, that tail may in time wag the dog. The "broken window" theory basically tells us if things within a community begin to look like crap, crap becomes the new caviar. Tax revenues, quality of life and crime all go in the tidy bowl boat and into

the blue. Community Services are a elixir for quality life. Under funding is a barometric sign for foul weather a generation from now. The deferred dividends of under funding Public Works are evident

The council cannot do this alone. One group called the 'Wizewatchers' recently contacted the council regarding funds aimed in a manner to support community policing. Although not their suggestion, perhaps these monies could fund the third priority of the council, a teen center, in partnership with the Police Athletic League, the Police Officers Association, volunteers, community services and the private and non profit sector.

We need volunteerism at it finest hour and engagement of the electorate. Shared sacrifice might be half the way home, shared whining is not. Attend or view city meetings, subscribe to city news letters, attend the Citizens Police Academy, talk to your councilmen, be an extender of community policing.

Fairfield is hemorrhaging. Community disinterest is not a tourniquet and hope is not a method. Remember, all bleeding stops, if not now... eventually.

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