

Sisters City Council Testimony – April 12th, 2023

Good evening. I'd like to give us all a break from specific issues for a few minutes and talk about something fundamental – some 2,500-year-old wisdom. You might consider it background, but I consider it foundational to what you'll be hearing from a number of us over the next many months.

Thucydides said that “Correct use of language is a moral issue. Its debasement is a symptom of moral breakdown.” For someone like me, who has been engaged in public policy at every level of governance for 35 years, incorrect use of language can be a big red flag, too. This is a big topic, especially in these times so I'll focus on just one important word tonight – “efficient.” It's used liberally in the City's Comprehensive Plan, and indeed, throughout documents associated with the State's planning rules and policies. It's a prominent term in all of the City's discussions about zoning. It makes sense that the City would use this word – if one is counting on the planning and land use poobahs in Salem to approve your plan, it's helpful to use their language.

This word is most often used as a modifier for “land use” – as in “efficient land use” or “land use efficiency.” So what does this mean? Efficient of what? A more honest term would be “higher-density land use” or “most profitable land use” but the planning and land use community long ago figured out that the “d-word” is a lightning rod for community opposition so they use “efficient.” It's such a positive word, isn't it? Everyone thinks efficiency is a good thing.

How many people here have read Plato's *Republic*? It was required reading for some of us who got our formal education decades ago. How many here know who Jane Jacobs was? She was a highly regarded 20th century architect and planner who published a well known book called *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* – a book about how urban planning destroyed the livability of many cities during the 1960s and 70s. She also wrote a much less known little book called *Systems of Survival* in 1995. This book was an update on Plato's *Republic*, in more accessible language.

In that book, Jacobs explained (as did Plato) that governance and commercial institutions are entirely separate things, and that they have no foundational tenets – principles of conduct – that are the same. Not a single one. But they *do* have *corresponding* tenets. “Efficiency” is a commercial – a business – tenet and never applies to the activities of governance institutions. The corresponding governance tenet is “effective” which is not at all the same thing as “efficient.” Harry Truman understood this implicitly when he said, “Wherever you have an efficient government you have a dictatorship.” Today he might say “Wherever you have an efficient government you have fascism – the unholy alliance of business and government, typically in service to the few at the expense of the many. Government in business to make money, for itself or its commercial

patrons. So what the City should be planning for is *effective* land use, and helping the community determine what that means, in detail.

There are other examples of language that is “incorrect” – disingenuous, misleading or disarming – and those will come up as we study all of the City’s policy and decision documents. Modern marketing is by definition a debasement of the language. And as Thucydides said, correct use of language is a moral issue. Thanks for listening.

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Kerry Prosser

From: LC <lcmarkd@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 13, 2023 5:40 AM
To: Kerry Prosser
Subject: City Council comments 4/12/23

I believe it was around 1992, I was living here in Sisters with my family and the current space age gas station had just gone in. There was some controversy over the brightly colored metal sign along the highway and how incompatible it was to the town of Sisters. I came down here to City Hall to talk to the folks about the town and the gentleman I was speaking with was telling me the story over the sign. I suggested they soften the harsh metal sign by building a frame around it using rustic timber or logs that would be more inline with the western theme of Sisters. The gentleman said something along the lines of "We need good ideas like that and joked what are you doing, you want a job." I remember it clearly.

That was just 30 years ago and boy just look how far we have fallen since. Death by a thousand cuts, The slow boil. From I'll conceived ideas, inexperienced or misguided staff, short sighted decisions, undo pressure, bad and hurried recommendations, hasty votes and carelessly written policies just look what now has been allowed to happen. The current gas station proposal could not illustrate better the complete lack of understanding and disconnect City Hall has with this community, it's residents and the apparent lack of respect for the town itself. What almost appears to be a complete and deliberate abandonment of this towns character, heritage and history.

When I started my career over 40 years ago in construction a very experienced tradesman who I was learning from told me that "the sign of a real professional is not someone who will never make a mistake but instead is someone who is capable of acknowledging their mistake and fixing it". It's just that simple. So I would ask this, instead of directing some of the staff here who were not even employed by the City when all of this chaos ensued, instead of spending their valuable time writing 700 plus word public relations columns in an attempt to convince the public of just how wonderful everything is in their town, maybe you can simply acknowledge all of this has the huge blunder and mistake that it clearly was and is today and decide to just fix it. It's really not that difficult once you decide to take responsibility.

Thank you ,
Mark Dickens