

OPINION

“CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW...
ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM
OF SPEECH, OR OF THE PRESS;”

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution

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Editorial

Addressing blight

Enforcing blight ordinances will positively impact our communities

The Tower City Council took an important step forward this week in the fight against blight. That now gives the city common cause with neighboring communities, like Ely and Orr, where city officials have been trying to address blight for a number of years.

As those efforts have demonstrated, the fight against blight isn't easy or immediate. Yet it's something that cities large and small can't ignore. Looking the other way may be the route of least conflict for city officials, but it is not fair to the vast majority of residents in our communities who do make an effort to maintain their properties in a safe and attractive manner.

Blight makes everyone in a community poorer, but particularly those who live nearby a blighted property. Numerous studies have demonstrated that blighted conditions reduce the value of neighboring properties by many thousands of dollars. Many blighted residences in area communities are not only eyesores, they are vacant and tax delinquent, meaning they are occupying space that could otherwise be home to a productive, tax-paying family living, working, and shopping in the local area. Every one of our communities is hungry for new residents and short on available housing at the same time. Allowing vacant, blighted properties to continue to exist in our communities is like posting a big “Not Welcome” sign at the entrance to town.

In Tower this week, it was the city's economic development authority that brought the subject back to the council. The Tower Economic Development Authority (TEDA) has been trying to find vacant residential properties that it could acquire, rehabilitate, and resell to new owner-occupants. It's Economic Development 101 — bringing more people to town, after all, is good for business. There's clearly demand for affordable housing in area communities, but the supply of acceptable homes is limited. Yet, too many owners of vacant and often blighted properties in the community have been uninterested in selling, preferring to do nothing to address their condition.

Rundown or uninhabitable buildings are just one part of the problem. Some property owners also misuse their properties as unofficial junkyards. Because residential property taxes in our commu-

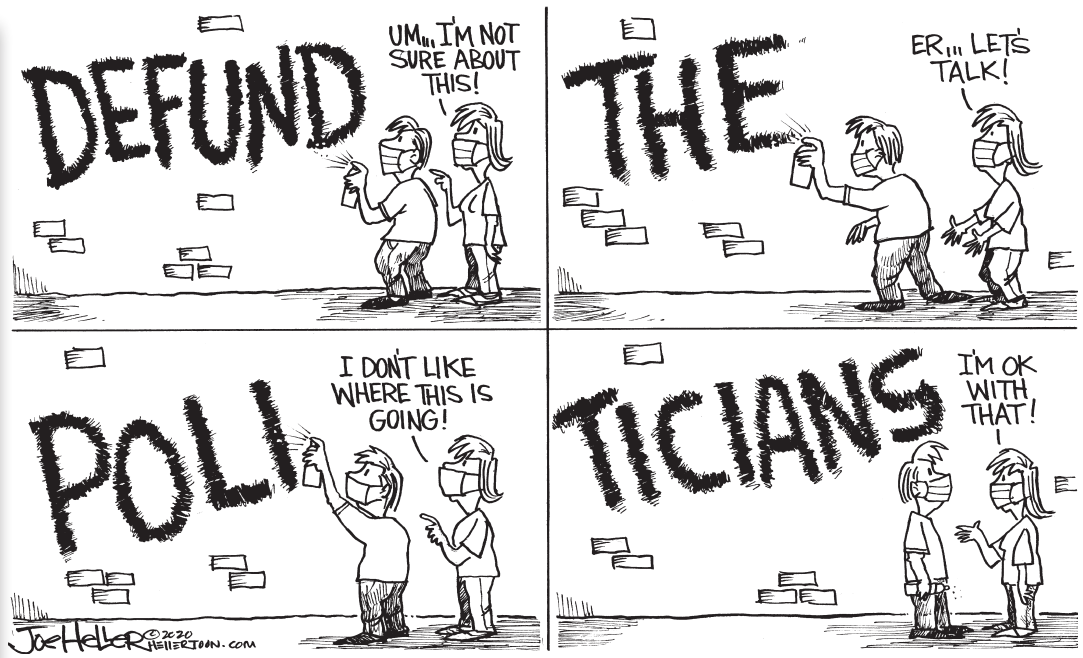
nities are relatively low, some owners have clearly opted to use their yards for cheap storage. One yard located within a half block of Tower City Hall is currently home to eight boats, most not currently licensed, two inoperable and unlicensed vehicles, along with a dilapidated garage and a vacant, unsecured two-story residence that is hopelessly beyond repair.

It's not that cities lack the tools to address blight. Many, including Tower, have adopted model blight ordinances developed by the League of Minnesota Cities. It's the political will to consistently enforce those ordinances that has been lacking in many cases.

Yet blight enforcement can yield major dividends for communities. In 2017, TEDA pushed the city to issue a violation notice and compliance order on the Standing Bear Marina, which had become derelict over the years. Within a couple months, the owners had sold the property to Your Boat Club, which has made significant investment in renovating the long-neglected facility. Indeed, for most cities, blight enforcement is one of their most effective tools for economic development.

We recognize that some will bristle at the very notion of blight enforcement, believing they have a constitutional right to live in whatever manner of disorder they choose. That much is true, but if they wish to live in town, ordinances dictate that their disorder be contained, either within a permitted garage, or their own home. When their “treasures” begin to overflow into their yard or the street, impinging on the enjoyment of others and lowering neighboring property values, it becomes a matter of public concern. Folks who can't abide by that have a constitutional right to move to the country. And even there, they will find that life isn't a free-for-all.

When it comes to blight, progress doesn't happen overnight. The effort in Tower will begin with education and encouragement, particularly for residential property owners. But continued violations could eventually lead to substantial fines for the worst offenders. Hopefully, those offenders will get the message that blight matters before it comes to that.



Letters from Readers

Tensions are high in the U.S.

So far, Trump has managed his own crises. He makes them up, stirs everyone else into yelling at each other, gets people wondering if he's really gone bonkers this time, and then dials it back down a couple notches so people get used to the new level of crazy. But this time he's got two very real crises, and maybe a third, that he has absolutely no control over. One is the economy, which is cratering. Second is the COVID-19 pandemic, which isn't going away, no matter how much we wish it would. Third is people fed up with the militarization of our local police forces all across the country. We are just plain getting tired of being occupied by our own military, even if they are in our supposedly local police forces.

Dave Porter
Minneapolis

BLM March shows Ely's true colors

I wanted to start off by thanking all of the brave members of this community who marched in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, and the protests and marches happening around our state, country, and world.

To see how my hometown showed up filled me with hope and inspiration. I am also grateful for Chad Houde and the Ely Police. Their support and graciousness has begun a new chapter in Ely. All of these things showed the true heart of the town I proudly call home.

Growing up in Ely I always knew that this town had love and acceptance running through its veins. If Saturday's march didn't prove that, I don't know what will. To see 300 of my friends and family peacefully marching through the streets and raising their voices against the injustice that is sown into the very fabric of America gave me hope.

Also, having grown up in this town, I know how racism and bigotry are not far under the surface. I hope that this march

has allowed for people with these beliefs to open their eyes, hearts, and souls. That it may be for them a chance to reflect and become a catalyst for change.

When you look at our town and see how it is growing and how people are investing in it, you really begin to grasp the worldly presence that this little town possesses. Every action that our community makes sends ripples around the world. We have a rich heritage. We have an artistic community that is constantly pulling on the world around us to create vast repertoires. We have intellectuals, craftspersons, humanitarians, all woven into the fabrics of our hometown. We are a place of refuge and inspiration.

I firmly believe that Ely is a good place to live, but I believe with even more conviction that my home town has the possibility to be a great place where all persons — no matter what color of their skin, gender, sexuality, or creed — can find solace in a community of open-minded, loving, and diverse individuals. As I move forward from that march, I am taking that seed of hope with me.

Throughout the next month items will be posted on the march's event page that I hope will continue the conversation, inspire others to stand up, educate, and create accountable actions that will produce a better society as a whole.

Thank you again, all of you courageous humans who marched together. You have started the conversations that will propel Ely into the future.

Love and light, keep living (the good life).

Ian Lah
Ely

Seeking stories from the portage trail

I have been researching the old portage trail between Kawishiwi Lake and Perent Lake in Lake County. I would like to hear experiences or anecdotes from anyone who may have either actually used this portage (over 50 years ago), or from those

who have attempted to use the portage since then or even more recently.

Here is what I've determined about the history of this route:

► Sometime around 1901, two trappers from the North Shore cleared a trail between Kawishiwi Lake and Perent Lake in Lake County. They were locally known as Tame Tom and Wild Bill.

► In 1920, U.S. Forest Service Landscape Architect Arthur Carhart used this same portage trail during a site visit to the Superior National Forest.

► After 1946, the Tomahawk-Kraft Paper Company built a haul road from Forest Center to Kawishiwi Lake and beyond.

► During the next 20 years, parts of the trail were cut over in a timber harvest and the slash was broadcast burned.

► The trail was no longer included on primary base maps after 1960.

► Sometime in the 1970s, the USFS abandoned the trail.

Today, BWCAW entry point 37 on Kawishiwi Lake hosts a rustic Forest Service campground located near the original portage trail.

If you have stories about this portage or if you have heard stories, please share them with me.

Tom McCann
Grand Marais

We welcome your letters

The *Timberjay* encourages letters to the editor. You can submit letters by mail at PO Box 636, Tower, MN 55790, or email letters to marshall@timberjay.com.

We ask that letters be limited to 300 words.

Letters are subject to editing, primarily for length and clarity.

Letters are a great way to offer your input to the *Timberjay's* editorial page. We want to know what you think!

Here's why Black Lives Matter to me

The first reason I can give for why black lives matter to me starts with one word: Christopher.

Christopher is the 15-year-old son of a good friend of mine, Kenya, who lives in North Carolina. He's an excellent student and a good athlete, with a dad who's a professional photographer and mom who's a writer and a web designer.



DAVID COLBURN

Christopher is black, and Kenya fears the day when he gets his driver's license and can go out on his own. I'm not sure if she's already had “the talk” with him about what to say and do to hopefully avoid harm if he's ever stopped by police, but if not I expect it will be coming soon.

It makes me mad as hell that a friend of mine should have to

do that and feel that way. Never did I have such worries raising my daughter.

But what's a mother to feel when discrimination and racism have been a part of her life for decades? In a recent blog column written at the request of a white friend, Kenya described a shopping trip with Christopher when he was nine during which the pair were followed all around a store by white clerks, while none of the other customers, all white, were being attended to at all. It was obvious they were being watched closely because

they were black, and it was so disturbing that they've never been back to that store.

Christopher is almost the same age that Trayvon Martin was when he left the home he was visiting eight years ago to walk to a convenience store for snacks. He never made it back, killed in a scuffle with a vigilante who followed him because he was black and wearing a hoodie and the attacker thought he looked suspicious. When George Zimmerman was acquitted of any crime in Trayvon's tragic death, by a predominantly white

jury, Black Lives Matter was born.

It happened to Trayvon — could it happen to Christopher? Fear of black men in our society is real. Racism is real. My friend Kenya has to live with the truth that her tall, handsome black son could be perceived by some people as threatening, and the fact that she does just rips my heart out. Her family's lives matter to me, as do the lives of all the other black families who can't ever just walk away

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Letters from Readers

TAAS ends up funding the city

The question I asked yesterday of the Tower City Council, "Is the City going to replenish the \$697,299 it owes to the TAAS Ambulance Fund?" was answered, in effect, during the video-conferenced city council meeting last night. Mr. Ceglar, of the city's accounting firm, was present to answer questions and further explain the 2019 city audit. The answer was not good for the Ambulance Service or for the member townships. And the answer is not simple, due to the overwhelming financial problems that the city has gotten itself into.

For example, the accountant was asked about the \$585,694 deficit in the Historic Harbor Project Fund. In reality, the bills for this project have actually been paid, but in doing so, the money was taken from the Tower Area Ambulance Fund. He took us to a page of the 2019 Audit and suggested that the harbor deficit on paper could be eliminated by doing the actual paper transfer from out of the ambulance fund. Other city funds are showing deficits also. The storefront renovation loan program has tens of thousands of dollars in delinquent loans. The city water and wastewater funds are in the red. Even the ambulance fund can't cover all of the problems. The harbor townhouse project is dead. Property taxes in Tower, already high, are going to go up. Utility rates are going to go up very significantly. It reminds me of the Tom Thumb story.

Last night the council kicked the can down the road by forming a "work group" to study the deficit situation. In the end, the ambulance fund that was earned by the TAAS billing for ambulance runs will end up being next to nothing, if not nothing. Supposedly, the ambulance vehicle replacement subsidy fund, raised through payments by the TAAS township members,

is safe from city transfers. This amount is separate from the \$697,299, and is not enough to pay for the new ambulance that was ordered over a year and a half ago. (That's another strange situation.)

One thing I'd like to note is that the TAAS has certainly generated enough money, had it not been spent on unrelated city expenses, to more than pay for the new ambulance, which will cost around \$240,000. Townships need to look into this before they make any more ambulance subsidy payments.

Here is a link to the 2019 City of Tower Audit. Pages 16, 19, 20, 38, 39 and 40 are of interest to TAAS members, <http://www.cityoftower.com/pdf/Tower%20Final%20Audit%20Report%202019.pdf>.

**Lee Peterson
Greenwood Twp**

Emotions vs. Truth

With the creation of instant communication, we, as a society, have now learned that we can influence others, many others, with the touch of a button. It does not matter if we are presenting a fact, partial fact, or outright untruth. This ability demands great responsibility. In the past days/months we have seen this ability abused to a tremendous degree....

When we experience an event we often are affected by the emotions of the moment. We take the event at face value and react. The Chinese flu and the death of a man in Minneapolis are two such events in our society currently. A snippet of video, unconfirmed facts and extensive commentaries have had a profound effect on large groups of people. The results of this are evident. History will look back at our ignorant rantings and lack of understanding and shake its head. It is now evident that in both cases our society has "shot it self in the foot."

Here's my point:

A. Power of any kind

demands responsibility.

B. The lack of a common social/moral standard has once again led our society to where we judge before the whole truth is known.

C. Respect is earned, not given, not funded. Remember Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.?

D. Truth is waiting to be told. Seek it and don't be led by the sensationalism of the events. Take the time to find the truth.

Keep in mind a few things: No leader in any capacity wants to lead by deception and untruth. Often, they are misinformed and emotionally/politically motivated.

Fear, not facts, has led to wearing masks.

No one wakes up and wants to be a thief or a murderer.

Our country's laws are to be upheld by every member of our society and we are accountable for our actions, all of us.

"We the People." The beginning of our Constitution's proclamation of independence demands that WE must SELF-govern and not wait for the government to govern. If we don't take this responsibility and we give up that right, we will be like sheep and our society will fall to herd mentality that is controlled by emotion, fear, and anger.

ONLY YOU AND I CAN DO THIS, not the government. Think about it.

**Bud Van Deusen
Eagles Nest**

Requeste an absentee ballot to ensure your vote

Why vote? We've all heard the reasons why people vote and don't vote. They range from "the electoral college makes the decision, so why bother," to "politics don't affect my life."

Here's another way to look at it: If 100 people vote, then 51 of them decide the election. But, if 100 people are eligible to vote, and only 60 people vote, just 31 people will decide the election.

And what if only half of those 60 people vote? Just 16 people will decide the election.

Luckily, we are in a state and a county with a proud history of strong voter turnout. But, when none of us knows whether there will be another wave of coronavirus in the fall, voting may become more challenging.

Now is the time to seek an absentee ballot or if you have not voted at your polling place before, to get registered to vote.

The easiest way to register is online at mnvotes.org. Any U.S. citizen who will be at least eighteen years old on the day of the election may vote. To vote in Minnesota, an individual must have resided here for twenty days preceding the election. An individual must have also completed all parts of a felony sentence and not have been ruled legally incompetent by a court.

Citizens may also complete their voter registration at the Ely City Clerk's office Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Voter registration can, of course, be completed at the polls on Election Day. The clerk's office is also happy to answer any questions you may have about voting, or contact the MN Secretary of State office 1-877-600-8683 for more information.

**Kay Vandervort
Ely**

My mask protects you, your mask protects me

After reading about strategies used in countries such as Austria and Japan where the COVID-19 is now under control, one factor stands out. In these countries, people cooperated. They all wore masks. In the end, by wearing masks, lockdowns were unnecessary and in time, the spread of COVID was eliminated.

For some strange reason, many seem to think that asking one to wear a mask is an extreme violation of one's personal

freedom. I read an article about risks for the spread of the virus. An example is that even in a grocery store if everyone is required to wear a mask, the risk of spreading the COVID-19 virus is dramatically reduced.

More information about COVID-19 surfaces on a daily basis. What is clear at this time is that the virus is spread through airborne droplets. Masks prevent the expulsion of these droplets into the air. So, if I wear a mask, my mask protects you and when you wear a mask, your mask protects me. Obviously, when we both are wearing masks, the protection is even more effective. This should not be that difficult to understand or to do.

Wearing a mask is now a social courtesy. I am grateful to business owners who have the plastic shield in front of the cash register, whose cashiers wear masks and gloves, and who ask that customers wear masks in their stores. I am grateful to all others around me who are wearing masks.

I feel uncomfortable when I see people not wearing masks in public spaces. Some say they don't believe in wearing a mask, as if this has anything to do with one's belief system. Much misinformation unfortunately spreads on social media about masks. However, if everyone cooperates, wearing masks in public spaces and practicing social distancing, the need for additional lockdowns can be prevented as well as an increase in the number of cases and deaths from the COVID. These strategies were effective in other countries where people did not feel that their rights were compromised by the simple mandate to wear a mask. People gladly cooperated and no lockdowns were necessary.

So I wear a mask. And am deeply grateful when I see all of those other masked people.

**Ellie Larmouth
Tower**

RACISM...Continued from page 4

from the realities of racism in America.

The second reason black lives matter to me is that for most of my adult life my life has mattered to them.

When folks here in the north lands of Minnesota ask me where I came from, my standard response has been that I moved here from Montana and am a small-town Kansas native. Both are true, but they omit a huge swath of my adult life that was spent working in large metropolitan areas.

Over a span of about 25 years, my professional life in early childhood education included years spent in Dallas, Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, south Los Angeles, and Spokane, Wash. All of those jobs brought me into treasured relationships with people and communities of color and provided experiences both sobering and enriching. I've been warmly invited into the lives of so many black colleagues, families, and friends that the injustices I've seen firsthand continue to pain me greatly, even as I make a new home for myself in very white northern Minnesota.

As a professor at St. Louis Community College, I worked for five years at the Ferguson campus. If Ferguson rings a bell, it's likely because of the police shooting there of Michael Brown and the ensuing riots. I'd left Ferguson by then, but problems with racism in area police departments were openly acknowledged and longstanding when I was there. It took less than a semester of being at SLCC to learn what a mess the Ferguson police department was when it came to policing the black community. Meanwhile, I was sickened nearly every spring after graduation when invariably some of my associate-degreed black students were passed over by programs in predominantly white neighborhoods who preferred hiring white staff with no degrees over far more qualified black candidates. I know that happened because those programs would then send some of those unqualified staff to my program to take classes.

When I moved from SLCC to the St. Louis County, Mo., Head Start program, one of my friends and colleagues had an experience that feeds

my present-day concern for Christopher's future.

I came to work one day to find the office abuzz about what had happened the night before to our Fatherhood Initiative coordinator, Wendell. He had been stopped by the police for "driving while black." After proceeding from a stop light on a street near Forest Park, he was pulled over by officers who told him that there had been some "trouble" in the area and that they needed to check him out. Wendell and his buddy were told to get out of the car, whereupon they were frisked from head to toe by one officer while the other searched the car. Finding nothing, the officers sent them on their way without any apology for the unjustified and illegal invasive search. Here was a man of exceptional integrity, a master's-degreed social worker, a friend and colleague of mine, who was reduced to tears as he retold the horrific story. He reluctantly filed a complaint, knowing that nothing would ever come of it, and nothing did. That's the way it worked back then, and for the most part still does unless someone is standing nearby with a camera. Would there be such

uproar over the death of George Floyd if it hadn't been captured on video? We all know the answer is a resounding "NO."

Driving while black, walking while black, swimming while black, and as we've seen recently, even bird watching while black can be dangerous for even the most educated, well-established black men in America, and often those dangers come in unprovoked encounters with police. Frankly, the best thing whites could do for police instead of dismissing the problems as a few bad apples is to demand that the police weed those bad apples out of the system so that their actions don't make the work of good officers harder and more dangerous. Unfortunately, it hasn't happened, but perhaps the protests in the wake of George Floyd's abhorrent and tragic death will bring change.

Black lives matter to me. For those of you inclined to respond with "all lives matter," of course they do, but you're sadly missing the point. We're not saying "only black lives matter" or "black lives matter more." Parents love all their children, but we all know sometimes one needs

more attention than the others. Black lives matter to me because it's long past time to address the issues that keep my black friends, colleagues, and children and families I've worked with and care about from fully reaping the benefits of being Americans.

And frankly, black lives matter to me because I'm tired as all get out of seeing my friends have to worry over things white people never give a second thought to, tired of seeing them having to be more qualified than whites to compete successfully for the same job, tired of worrying about the fate of the Christophers of America and the world. I'd like to experience a life free from the angst of seeing people I care about suffer injustice in their lives. Striving to clear the hurdles in the paths of the black people I care about isn't nearly as hard as having to deal with the hurdles myself, but it's my responsibility to tackle if I ever hope to experience the peace and equality I wish to see in the world.

RE-OPENING...Continued from page 4

notes the map was first proposed a century ago by USFS planner Arthur Carhart and renowned Bois Forte band member Leo Chosa.

"We hope that residents and visitors alike will be pleased to learn that our famous lakes, many now named after loggers,

miners, numbers, or days of the week, actually have beautifully lyrical and descriptive native names. It's a novel and exciting project that will honor our canoe country Ojibway legacy," said Schurke.

The IRRR grant on which EFS is dependent for its summer

survival requires a dollar-for-dollar match from community donations.

"Our EFS friends have been generous in the past," said Schurke "While these are tough times, we're hoping their support will ensure we can unlock this critical grant. Our spring fund

appeal is being launched this week to help keep EFS afloat."

Donations are universally deductible up to \$300 per individual or \$600 per couple, Schurke noted, due to a provision in the recent federal CARES Act.

"We hope people will visit our website, www.ElyFolkSchool.org,

where our spring fund appeal and our upcoming online and on-site classes are posted. During these restrictive times, community connecting points like EFS are more valuable than ever."

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