

Opinions

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Elected Officials Contact Info.

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Independence, more than just a name, it's our way of life!

I'm a citizen of the City of Independence, a member of a farming family, and a part of the community that has been formed by people who work the land they own to provide for their family. It has recently come to our attention that our city, of which we choose to call Independence, is attempting to redefine agriculture and forestry within city limits. By the way, the county, state, and federal government already have definitions for these things; most cities are perfectly happy to work with those definitions.

In their last meeting, which they held online only and to which they did not readily provide access to us, the general public, they discussed the fate of the farmer without giving the farmer the chance to respond.

This table, which I have included below, and the definitions they are choosing to re-interpret to their liking, limit the crops a person can grow on their agricultural land. They also require that in order to grow a crop outside of these guidelines one would have to apply for an interim use permit from the city offices, pay the permitting fee (which is no light sum), and go before the counsel to be granted permission to grow and produce such crop.

Zoning Districts			
Type of Use	Ag-Agriculture	RR-Rural Residential	CU-Commercial Light Industrial
Agriculture	P	I	NP
Forestry		NP	NP
Horticulture	I	NP	NP

P - Permitted, A - Accessory, C - Conditional, I - Interim, NP - Not Permitted

Subd. 3. "Agriculture." The use of land for the growing and/or production of field crops, livestock, and livestock products for the production of income including, but not limited to, the following: defined as follows:

(a) "field crops" including: shall mean barley, soybeans, corn, hay, oats, potatoes, rye, sorghum and sunflowers, and
(b) "livestock" shall be defined as provided in subsection 510.05, subdivision 44, and;
(c) "livestock products" including: shall mean milk, butter, cheese, eggs, meat, fur and honey, or similar products involving only light, on-site processing; light processing shall consist of only products grown or generated on the premise.

Subd. 34. "Forestry." The cultivation and management of forests or woods located on the premises, including the felling and trimming of timber, and associated light production such as cutting or sawing of timber into rough lumber, but not including the sale and transportation of finished lumber from the premises or the storing or stockpiling of such lumber, transportation of timber and timber logs, pulpwood, cordwood and similar products; sawing of logs into lumber and similar operations.

Subd. 42. "Horticulture." The use of land for the growing, or production and sale of fruits, vegetables, flowers, cultured sod, and nursery stock, including or ornamental plants and trees; for the production of income. Such terms shall not include the operation of a commercial nursery (wholesale or retail), landscaping business, tree trimming removal business or similar enterprise.

This change to the definitions of agriculture requires that the only crops to be grown are barley, soy, corn, hay, oats, potatoes, rye, sorghum, and sunflowers. It also removes the verbiage that says all crops, livestock, and livestock products can be generated for 'the production of income.' Why would anyone choose to do these things if they can not use them to provide for their family? Why should it be so different if a person grows vegetables in their garden to feed their family or grows some and sells them. Should the city of Independence really be allowed to dictate what a person can and cannot grow on their own property? Should a farmer be forced to go before city council to get approval to grow crops on their own land? As a small business owner who grew up here, works here, and pays taxes here, this does not seem to represent the people who live here and make this community what it is.

This same proposed change to the zoning ordinance doesn't just tread on those of us who work the land to produce a field crop, but it also treads on the folks who may have lesser acreage, but still produce a 'crop.' It limits the production of forestry products, disallowing hard working families, from selling and transporting their beautiful wood products from their shop. It prevents people from growing nursery trees for sale off-site. They are limiting horticulture to also be deemed as, 'the growing and production of fruits, flowers, sod,

and plants', but not 'for the production of income.' What about all the roadside stands, veggie producers, and local strawberry patch? Why would we do any of these things if not so we could sell them? This community was built by the kind of people who are willing to work long hours, and to work with their hands and with the earth. This doesn't just affect a few people, this is an attack on a way of life for many of us. Our Land is a precious thing. Since when does the local government have the right to dictate what a person can grow on their own property? Government is intended to be for the people, by the people, and of the people. Why is this being done at a time when people can not gather? Why are local businesses and community members not being alerted to these changes?

Not only does the city want to limit the rights of farmers on agriculturally zoned land, but this same amendment to the ordinance speaks of disallowing all agriculture, horticulture, and forestry on any tract of rural residential land. Anyone choosing to grow any crop on their property in the rural residential area must again request an interim use permit, pay the permitting fee (once again, exorbitant), and wait at the mercy of the city counsel to see if they can produce a tract of strawberries or have chickens.

My fellow citizens of Independence, consider why we love living here. We value our ability to support our family by the means we find necessary. We value supporting our friends and local business



State Rep. Marion O'Neill

Legislative Update

Public Safety Committee Hearings

Last Saturday and Monday of this week, the Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee held hearings for 12 hours on three major proposals packages containing 19 separate bills to reform police departments.

Special Session House File 1 (HF 1) addresses use of force, investigations, prosecution, and bail restrictions. Specifically, it would take authority to prosecute all officer-involved death cases away from County Attorneys and give it to the Attorney General, create a new unit in the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension to investigate officer-involved death cases, increase the standard for a peace officer to use deadly force from apparent risk of death or great bodily harm to self or another to imminent risk of death or great bodily harm, and require courts to use a presumption of release of a defendant on personal recognizance instead of money bail in most misdemeanor cases.

Special Session House File 2 (HF 2) makes changes to the admissibility of critical incident stress management for emergency service providers in court, appropriates money for community-led public safety grants, creates critical incident review teams, requires use of force reporting to the FBI, and requires every peace officer in the state to be trained in interactions with persons with autism.

The final bill, Special Session House File 3 (HF 3), mandates local Law Enforcement Citizen Oversight Councils for agencies of 50 or more officers, makes complaints against peace officers public data, retroactively removes the statute of limitations for lawsuits against a peace officer for sexual abuse or death of a person caused by a

economy. So why must we pay such a high price for this freedom in Independence? Why are there now such restrictions?

If you are reading this, and you are as outraged as I, you may be wondering what you can do. Well, some sage advice, contact your Mayor, your City Council members, and your city staff. Let them know your feelings on this matter! This is not a time to sit idly and watch to see what happens. They are taking this opportunity to make bold moves that affect us all without our common knowledge.

What else can you do? Tell everyone! Your neighbor, your parents, your farmer down the road. For all those that have internet access, please check out the city website. The information is public, and available. There are recordings of the meetings, as well as posted minutes. For those who do not have internet access, let this serve as your point of contact.

Please, let's band together and put a stop to this madness! Anita Volkenant, Independence

peace officer, prohibits choke holds, hog-tie holds, and "warrior-style training", and implements a duty to intercede when another peace officer is using unreasonable force. Additionally, it makes changes to peace officer grievance arbitration, requires guidelines for positive community interactions, and allows the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul to implement residency requirements for police officers.

Unfortunately, all of these bills are lacking fiscal notes, so we don't have a clear picture of just how much they will all cost. There are aspects of these bills that I do support, like the duty to intercede, banning choke-holds and changes to arbitration so departments can fire officers who violate laws and training standards, but other pieces of these bills are problematic. We do need to take a hard look at use of force and other issues, but we need to do so thoughtfully, to increase public safety and make real change, without just supporting policies that sound good on paper but don't accomplish their stated goals.

HF 1 would have the state come in and take power away from duly-elected County Attorneys. It requires the Attorney General, a partisan office, to take over all prosecutions for officer-involved deaths. While proponents claim that the Minnesota County Attorneys Association supports it, the process they went through to arrive at that decision involved only 26 counties voting on whether to support or oppose the provision. In the end, 16 (mostly metro-area) counties voted to support the provision, and 10 voted against it. When taken in the context of all 87 counties, many of which are rural, I don't think this decision represents the perspective of the majority of county

Community Corner

By Shelby Hulstein



All this nothing

"If I ever get out of here, I'm having my eyes lasered." Anyone else laugh in disbelief when Patricia said this in "You've Got Mail?" I could watch Kathleen Kelly deliver her zingers and wait with anticipation for Joe Fox to deliver fresh daisies every single day if given the chance. But I love my husband and don't want him to suffer through that many viewings of my favorite rom-com, so I resort to frequently quoting it and finding ways to bring it up in conversation. I'm giddy just writing this, as I can relate this scene with Patricia to the navigation of the shutdowns, restrictions, and limitations COVID has halted normal life with.

The scene takes place in an elevator where Patricia, Joe Fox, an older tenant named Veronica, and the elevator operator, Charlie, are trapped between floors. After an unsuccessful attempt to open the doors, they sit on the floor and begin reflecting on past decisions and what they would do differently if they're able to get out.

Veronica pledges to start speaking to her mom more, Charlie decides he will finally propose to his girlfriend, and Patricia, rummaging through her purse, flippantly remarks she will get her eyes lasered. Then, as Joe Fox begins to share, he is cut off as Patricia cries out, "Where are my Tic-Tacs?! Ugh!" And, it doesn't end there. When she notices everyone looking at her, all she says is, "What?"

During these past months, I think we've all experienced some form of being "trapped in the elevator." Some of us reacted like Patricia, focusing inward, and some like the other three, focusing outward. Regardless of how we have responded to the pandemic, there's a lot of grace to be given. After all, how is someone supposed to react when all of a sudden, their normal routine is thrown to the wind? How does one process the removal of the choices they once saw as basic privileges? As a homebody and introvert, I don't need to be around people

all the time, but even I found myself itching to get out and be able to simply sit in a coffee shop or casually stroll through Target and look at home décor without feeling the need to get in and out quickly.

The problem lies in reacting like Patricia and then continuing to respond like Patricia. Imagine what the world would look like right now if we all solely focused on what we were missing out on, instead of seeing the blessings.

How many of us have been racing around, full speed, making a mental list of things we wish we had time for? Here's that time. How many of us wish we could spend more time with our family and eat dinner together? Thanks to working from home, many have been able to. Sure, we can't go out to see a movie yet, get a big group of folks together at a restaurant, or have a lot of activity options, but who says the most impactful, special moments have to be something big? I think the heart behind intentional time is the best measure. And, more often than not, the "little nothings" far outweigh the "big somethings." I know for myself, the simple, genuine moments fill me up more than any large event ever could. I hope that, throughout this strange time, you are also filled up with the "little nothings." If this has been a struggle for you, I'd like to suggest taking a step back from the chaos, taking a deep breath, and really start focusing on those blessings in everyday life that we often miss.

And that leads into the last quote I'll end with. Even though Kathleen Kelly is referencing her and Joe Fox's email communication vs. face-to-face chats, it relates strongly to the different forms of socializing we've adapted to: "The odd thing about this form of communication is that you're more likely to talk about nothing more than something. But, I just want to say that all this nothing has meant more to me than so many somethings."

attorneys. The Pine County Attorney, Reese Fredrickson, had this to say about the decision:

"County attorneys are elected to make these tough decisions. Where there is any conflict or appearance of conflict, we transfer our cases to a neighboring county because we have faith in each other as prosecutors. I've unfortunately handled a few cases where law enforcement was the accused for other counties - I've never once been accused of handling these cases unfairly, and people throughout the system have been satisfied with the results. As officers of the court, we are trusted with keeping bias or an appearance of bias out of the

system."

During the committee hearing on HF 2, I was extremely disappointed that the author amended the bill to remove peer-to-peer counseling and stress management for officers. Maintaining good mental health is a key piece of having officers who can exercise sound judgment and connect to the community and stress management and peer-to-peer counseling are an important part of that.

HF 2 also includes a provision to allow felons who have been released from incarceration to vote, even if they are still serving probation. The

O'Neill

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During political election campaigns, we prefer to reserve space in the letters column primarily for our readers and not necessarily for the candidates or campaign committees. We ask that candidates and people who are active on their committees, please identify themselves when submitting material during a campaign. We will consider publishing that material elsewhere on the Opinion Pages. This is not a perfect system. Sometimes candidates feel entitled to respond within the letters column to what they see as serious false charges or significant factual errors made against them in someone's earlier letter. This newspaper tries to be fair in those cases. Do not wait until election eve to raise a serious new issue, when insufficient time remains for a reply.

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