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## Letters to the Editor

Request for harsher oversight on parcel tax error

I was taken aback by the Nov. 15 article "Lafayette school district seeks to quickly rectify parcel tax error." It's the job of newspapers to keep government honest, and ask tough questions. But this story blandly accepts everything the Lafayette School District has to say about the issue. The mistake happened initially more than two years ago, and was exacerbated this year by a second error. \$400,000 was mistakenly billed. The mistake/s were caught not by the District, but by a curious taxpayer. And now, according to the article, the District says it will repay taxpayers "quickly," but doesn't give any indication of when.

I supported the Measure B parcel tax, but this looks like pretty lame oversight, to say nothing of accounting aptitude, by the District.

Lamorinda Weekly could have and should have asked some much tougher questions - and thought harder about putting the word "quickly" in the headline.

Best,

Chris Rauber

Lafayette

Request for more in-depth solutions and news coverage

For better or for worse, I ended up an almost accidental Lamorinda resident (now going on eight years). And while I and the average homeowner of the Lamorinda area have almost nothing in common, still I care about the regions, because, whether one approves of it or not, it has a distinct culture, a distinct geography, and it has a possibility for greatness.

What I'd like to see is the three cities forming a kind of Benelux union, (and you might have to look that one up) where a world-class infrastructure exists which marks it not merely as a NIMBY community warding off crime and any kind of development that could hurt property values, but as an integrated model of civic life.

I won't even say whether a rail system, even an unprofitable and symbolic one, or a mass-transit gondola, or some other type of system, should connect it all. It would be oppressive to put one particular model forward as the only solution. But rather, I will say, some kind of infrastructure, or set of infrastructures, should move the region out of its current "by fiat" version of tightly-controlled and 100 percent safe charities or activities. In other words, Lamorinda should be about something other than "my family" and "my home value" and "my safety." This is not to say that I don't personally love the safety and cleanliness and nearly crime-free aspect of our lives here, but merely to say that, at some point, one fine day, we need to move away from the concept of safetyism and certaintyism.

A little backbone is needed here. There is, of course, only one hotel, and zero public laundry facilities, and no theory of what to do with our own homeless, except the usual methods of intimidation, prison or exile to Central California. Again, I'm not specifically saying we should have our own shelter, or even that exactly a laundromat is required. I'm not pushing for any one improvement, but something deeper than a list of exact petitions or proposals.

What I'm saying is that this is a magical place, but that it's not living up, even partially to its potential. It's time we admitted who we are. We are a collection of small European cities, and we should finally mature enough to act that way.

We should have something other than depressing buses, not because those programs would be self-supporting, or absolutely necessary, but because they say something about who we are, where we come from, and what we want the larger world to be. In this one sense, the roundabout, much debated, was a great idea. It is fundamentally a European way of doing something. But roundabouts, fountains, plazas, rail, gondolas - these things are important not because we exactly need them, but because they represent something larger, a distinct European Lamorinda identity.

But the reason I wrote this short tract was not even to dream any of these changes could happen now, but because, I assert, the first step in getting a great people to look at their own possibility for greatness in the larger world, they need leadership in media. That's where you come in. It's all very fine that little Johnny won an award and is going to Washington D.C. to be honored, or that Mary did well in the soccer tournament, and so on. But, at last, we have real problems with traffic, with poverty, with addiction, with mental illness; and we know the county of Contra Costa is just too corrupt and ineffectual and entrenched to move on anything at any level. But Lamorinda is small enough to really move, and could be transparent enough and local enough to innovate in ways that would, by example, pressure the rest of the county to move on into the modern world, a thing which Contra Costa resists in an uncanny way, in spite of its world class wealth.

I'd like to see your paper be more than a feel-good self-celebration of upper-middle-class self-congratulatoryness. It's time to go deep, to believing in something larger than merely "my safe non-controversial upper-middle-class rigid happiness thingy." It just is finally time for this region to grow out of it, if for no other reason than the rest of the county is so passive and sleepy and lifeless that someone needs to shoulder that burden. Media is important.

You are our local paper. Let's awaken and move ahead.

Mel C. Thompson

Lafayette

EDITOR'S NOTE: Moraga does in fact have a laundromat: Teddy Bear Coin Laundry, 496 Center Street, Moraga.

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