

OPINION

Letters To The Editor

Supervisors vote to marginalize the historic community of Ebony — What's wrong with this picture?

To the Editor:

Since the vote on January 29, 2020, many in the community have expressed how shocked, disheartened, disappointed, and disturbed they are that the Brunswick County Board of Supervisors voted 3-2 to rezone historic, rural-residential-agricultural land at the heart of Ebony, Virginia, to become home to yet another Dollar General. Not only is this not a fit for the Ebony area, but also it opens the doors for future commercial development directly alongside Prospect Cemetery/Church — a historic landmark and anchor.

This vote happened despite that 75% of the meeting attendees who filled the room were staunchly against it and mirrored the broader community's sentiment. Speakers provided substantive comments that showed more significant implications, demonstrating how the new store would harm the community and not be a net benefit to either Ebony or the County as a whole. Most importantly, we showed how approval of this rezoning application would not be compliant with zoning governance enforcement for the County that is legislated in the Code of Virginia and the responsibility of the Board of Supervisors.

From the perspective of the Ebony Preservation Group (EPG), this vote to approve the rezoning application reflected a blatant disregard of land management governance (Zoning Ordinances, 2037 Comprehensive Plan and the Board of Supervisors Vision for 2035) designed to prevent precisely what has been allowed to happen. Legitimate rezoning decisions must consider all impacts and trade-offs. This decision does not; it only accommodates Dollar General with no regard to the negative impacts on the community, and suggests a grim future of the County. In any case, the land use maps do not support any form of Business zoning for the area.

Given the significant negative implications to Ebony associated with rezoning the subject land (and implications for similar scenarios in all A-1 Districts across the County), the EPG was formed to pool and coordinate our time and talent to fight it and to create a communication platform. We are all for business development that is appropriately aligned with location and does not harm the character of rural communities and the overarching rural character and attraction of the County. Dollar General is

not a fit for the heart of the quaint Ebony community, and it will be harmful.

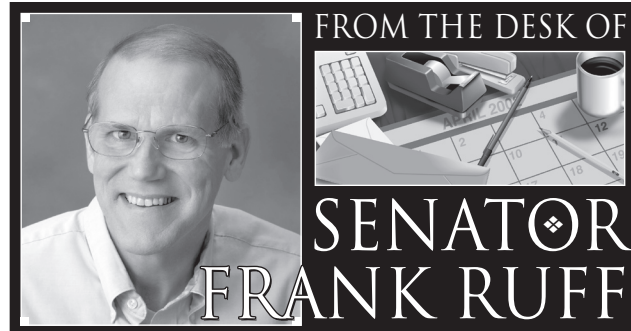
We want to thank all those who took a stand to oppose this rezoning request and, in particular, Supervisors John Zubrod (Meherrin, home district) and Bernard Jones (Red Oak), Planning Commissioner Michael Grimm (Meherrin), and Planning Commission Chair Jay Warfel (Meherrin). They demonstrated the leadership required to achieve the vision and a bright future for Brunswick County. It is so sad and disturbing that Supervisors Seward (Sturgeon) and Tyler (Powellton), and Chair Harris (Totaro), seem to have deviated from the responsibilities of their position. Also notable: those who forced the approval are not representatives of the citizens of the Meherrin District and yet voted to irrevocably change the homes and lives of many from several generations.

Why was so much effort put into circumventing the County's zoning management tools and their purpose? Verbal responses we have received so far don't add up. We have requested a written response from the Planning Department detailing how this rezoning act complies with the Zoning Ordinances and Comprehensive Plan. We await their response.

What's next? The vote passed. People are unhappy. However, we're working to make the situation as right as it can be made. We have reached out to come together in designing the best possible Dollar General store and setting for the location and character of the community. Dollar General has maintained they want to "fit in" and be a great neighbor. Taking us up on our offer would go a long way in demonstrating they mean what they say and foster goodwill toward a common goal.

Again, we appreciate the love and commitment to Ebony and all efforts to preserve this special place and its place as a strategic asset for Brunswick County and the Commonwealth. If you would like to learn more about our group or read a more comprehensive response to the vote, please visit KeepEbonyCountry.org. We aren't going anywhere.

Respectfully Submitted,
Anne Edwards Hartley and the Ebony Preservation Group



It Started As A Joke

A West Virginia legislator decided to have some fun and get some publicity by offering the Winchester area the opportunity of becoming a part of West Virginia. The Senator re-offered the deal that West Virginia had made when they split from Virginia one hundred sixty years ago. He reminded the folks in the most northwest corner of Virginia that West Virginia never withdrew the option to join those western counties to become West Virginia during the Civil War era. He was better able to understand how very upset Virginians have become with the policy initiatives being offered by the Virginia Democrats.

It appears that the discontent of Virginians was better understood in West Virginia than the modern Democrats in Virginia. Last week, the Governor of West Virginia upped the ante. He, joined by President Falwell of Liberty University, offered the same invitation to any county in Virginia. I'm sure more Virginians will think this is a good idea once they realize all that the Democrats are pushing through on party line votes.

Not to be outdone, Senator Obenshain reminded the Senate that an early agreement of our founding fathers was that Maryland and Virginia gave the federal government 100 square miles to create our nation's capital, Washington, D.C. Years later, the federal government decided they didn't need that much space and returned the Virginia portion back to Virginia. This became the county of Arlington. Obenshain proposed giving Arlington back to Washington to help bring Virginia back into political balance.

Bad Legislation Continues To Be Passed

Despite opposition, many bills that those in our region disagree with are being passed. We can expect that this course will continue. The Democrats are convinced that they won the elections in the last couple of years because voters support the policies they are pushing this year. I tend to believe that many of the seats they won were in defiance of the President and had little to do with the items they are pushing. As they continue to argue among themselves which version of the assault on second amendment rights they will use, now other issues are targets. They are focused on ending policies that protect the unborn. I expect they won't be happy until they make it a drive-thru process. Likewise, they are attempting to remove proof of identity requirements at the polls, as well as working around the Electoral College system that was established in our constitution to protect the interests of the small states. The bills that they are passing effecting business will drive prices up, employment down, and force many small Mom and Pop operations out of business.

Few will recognize the Commonwealth of Virginia after all the new laws go into effect on July 1st. Fewer small businesses will survive, driving business to national chains.

Several Bills That I Offered

While many bills that I oppose are going through the process, several of mine have been successful in the Senate and might also be approved in the House.

One would allow the voters of Mecklenburg to vote to increase the sales tax in the county until the new school project is complete. This will be on the ballot in November. Passage of this will relieve some of the pressure to raise real estate taxes. If the voters approve this, it is expected to raise about \$4 million dollars annually. Much of that total will come from out of the county and state.

One successful bill builds on the legislation that Delegate Marshall and I got passed last year allowing Virginia farmers to grow hemp. In 2019, many farmers tried growing crops, and, in the process, learned much about how to grow, harvest, and sell their crop. This year's bill better conforms Virginia's regulation to match the federal emergency regulations. This allows growers to get crop insurance.

Another bill will allow our state distilleries to ship small orders directly in the state. This would allow them to sell directly to entities such as restaurants outside our region where the ABC stores do not carry their products. This should allow our small distilleries to compete against the big companies that are heavily advertised.

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Governor's initiative key to increasing access to local jobs

By Jackie Gill Powell, Angeline Godwin, and Quentin Johnson

Get a Skill, Get a Job, Give Back. That is the vision of Governor Ralph Northam's proposed G3 initiative, designed to support Virginia's students. If approved by the state legislature in the coming weeks, the plan will open new pathways to success for low- and middle-income Virginians to gain employment in high-demand jobs.

Under the plan, citizens of the Commonwealth will have unprecedented access to gaining the real-world skills and experience necessary to meet the current and projected demands of Virginia's workforce. This is especially true in our colleges' service regions, following major economic shifts from Virginia's former reliance on industries such as tobacco, furniture, and textiles.

The Governor's proposal is not a "free community college" program, but it does aim to significantly, if not completely, reduce out-of-pocket costs for students. The plan also includes textbook costs and other cost-of-living expenses to further support students and alleviate some of the financial barriers that prevent students from pursuing or completing their education.

Our region of Southern Virginia is witnessing an exciting moment in its history, wherein technological advancements are transforming not only our workforce, but also the way we all live our lives. Ensuring we are prepared to meet the demands of rapid economic innovation is vital to our region's success.

Virginia's community colleges are already committed to serving our localities and providing affordable access to academic and professional training opportunities. Governor Northam's proposed plan will allow us to expand on that commitment and increase access to high-demand training in five key areas: Healthcare, Information Technology and Computer Science, Manufacturing and Skilled Trades, Early Childhood Education, and Public Safety.

Demand for workers in these fields is growing in Virginia. This growth means job security, a steady and sufficient income, and access to healthcare and benefits that will allow our communities to flourish and thrive.

Under the G3 model, our career-oriented training

programs have been updated to align with the needs of the modern student. As students progress through G3 programs, they earn industry-recognized credentials which build from entry level skills to advanced. The more credentials that students earn, the more competitive they will become for higher-level jobs. Moreover, if a student needs to work while pursuing their education, they are immediately eligible to apply for jobs in their field with the first credential they earn. This means working students could advance their career and their academics simultaneously. This model provides stackable credentials, meaning that the work students complete for one prepares them for and applies to the work they will complete to earn the next. That will allow students to earn more money as they advance in their chosen fields.

Professionals already in the workforce may enter at their specified level and continue on to earn an advanced credential without starting from the beginning of the pathway. This flexibility is critical to supporting modern students and professionals seeking advanced training.

Our community colleges have partnered with employers to transform programs put skills first and allow students to earn stackable college credentials as they move through their training. This allows a student to start and stop, while working, without losing academic progress along the way to earning an associate degree.

A current community college student, a 48-year-old mother of two studying Early Childhood Education, shared that if a program like the proposed G3 initiative had existed two semesters ago, she would not have needed to take out student loans to cover her tuition and textbooks.

One male cybersecurity graduate, a 43-year-old father and military spouse, did not buy his textbooks because they were too expensive. He often borrowed a classmate's books to complete homework assignments. The student said, "I was able to make it work but if I could have had a program to help pay for the books, it would have been much easier to pass my classes."

A welding graduate, aged 31, a single mother who lived with her parents and worked full-time through most of school was awarded federal and state financial aid

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