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Government idiocy still drilled into our heads

By Doug Epperhart

Dorothy got there via tornado. Alice fell down a rabbit hole. I walked in the door of a school auditorium and volunteered to help my neighborhood association with its newsletter.

My entry into an unreal reality was not so dramatic and the characters don't wear odd clothes, but the world inhabited by politicians and their minions is every bit as strange. White is black, down is up, and there is little, if any, common sense applied to problem solving. Often, merely defining the problem to be solved is a problem for the folks in this wonderland.

Let's start with a mayor who believes Los Angeles can handle all the high-density residential projects dreamed up by developers. Some of these massive new high-rises will offer condos smaller than garages because everybody in L.A. is single. Another incentive to Manhattanize would allow developers to construct buildings without providing parking for tenants.

Of course, all these cool people with no parking spaces won't own cars.

They'll all walk everywhere or take public transportation. No, really. Stop laughing. In the alternate universe at City Hall, accepted "smart growth" gospel says it's OK to increase population density decades before adequate transit infrastructure is built.

It's not just downtown, though. For example, there is the epic of San Pedro's proposed waterfront development. (I think we're up to about a dozen plans so far.) This is a case of the masterminds at the port asking the same questions over and over, hoping they'll get a different answer. Ideally, it's one that involves endorsing their proposal to build a cruise ship terminal next to the beach.

Every time the port rolls out a new plan, the response has been the same:

"We want a continuous promenade along the waterfront." "We want cruise ships docked near downtown to benefit merchants there." "We want Ports O' Call fixed up." "We want connections between the community and the water."

Apparently, it's easier for the folks at the port to pretend San Pedrans are too dense to figure out the right answer than to actually listen to what we're saying. Or maybe they're simply distracted by the far-off strains of Disney music floating across the water and don't hear us.

We also have the problem of politicians whose ability to comprehend simple logic is somewhat tenuous. Would you be upset if the city were to spend \$50,000 building a fence that may be taken down in a few months? That may happen.

Vicki McIntire of the Point Fermin Residents Association has been working with Frank O'Brien of the Harbor-Watts Economic Development Corporation for four years on a plan to create a coastal view park where Pacific Avenue ends.

O'Brien's group has a grant from the California Coastal Conservancy to create linkages between the town and its waterfront.

Regular updates have been presented to Point Fermin residents and the coastal council. Recently, we were introduced to the design for a new fence intended to replace the existing chain link. What's envisioned is a steel structure featuring angled bars and circles emulating seaweed and bubbles.

Compared with any other fence in San Pedro, it's art. You know, the kind of thing you might see in Santa Monica or Newport Beach.

Enter Councilwoman Janice Hahn, who committed to replacing the existing fence as a means of denying access to the Sunken City area between Pacific Avenue and Point Fermin Park. The councilwoman wants to make good on her promise to the mother of the woman who, some months ago, fell to her death there.

Hahn is not happy with how long it has taken the Department of Recreation and Parks to replace the fence and demanded they get the job done now. Rec and Parks is going ahead with building a plain tubular steel fence (like the one at the east end of Point Fermin). The estimated cost is \$50,000. When the overlook park plan is approved, this fence would be torn out and replaced with the decorative "bubbles" design.

It's been suggested that Rec and Parks can ill afford to waste taxpayer's money on a temporary fence. This folly is compounded by the fact that O'Brien has offered Conservancy grant money to pay for the fence if the "bubbles" design is used. He said it will take about 4-6 weeks to fabricate and install the fence.

In the real world, spending \$50,000 on a short-term fix is ridiculous. In government land, it's the norm.

O'Brien, the pragmatist, says, "If this is what the city wants to do, I'll work with it."

McIntire, the realist, says, "Here's another perfect example of how government looks like an idiot."

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