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Acrimony over impact fee vote continues

Al Whittle, who's a frequent critic of county government decisions on fiscal and growth policy, has had more to say about last week's impact fee vote than what was posted recently by [Lakeland Local](#).

In a separate communication, Whittle took offense at Commission Chairman Sam Johnson's position that not only was lowering impact fees supposedly good for the economy but that anyone opposed to the idea was somehow against the betterment of Polk County.

This letter, if nothing else, shows the continuing polarization in this county on growth issues.

"I'll make this short because I intend to send a more general note on today's public hearing to you and the other commissioners.

I was not only disappointed in the bad business decision that the Board made today in arbitrarily reducing impact fees, but I was also personally disappointed in you and your role as Chairman. Heretofore, I thought Jack Myers was the only potential candidate to outdo Bruce Parker as the most arrogant and insensitive Chair on record. But today you threw your hat into the ring with gusto.

Specifically, opening of the public hearing with the Attorney's inappropriate swearing of those who wanted to speak and threats of prosecution for perjury were completely out of place. That serves only to chill the public's constitutional right to petition the government.

Requiring an oath to participate in a public hearing has no purpose. We are not witnesses. We are citizens who are there to express our views for consideration by the public servants we elected -- nothing more - nothing less. The perjury threat is obviously empty since you haven't prosecuted any of the many special interest representatives who routinely distort the facts in testimony before you. This policy simply has no justification and must be eliminated forthwith except in those few cases where sworn testimony is required (as opposed to public input).

I was personally insulted by your closing homily in which you insinuated that those of us who weren't in agreement with your bizarre actions today were not interested in the future of this community. In my case, I proved my concern for the "community" by dodging bullets on the nation's battlefields while you were still probably in diapers; spent an entire career in public service; retired as a partially disabled combat veteran; and have invested untold amounts of time and talent in Polk County. Moreover, I didn't get here by accident of birth like you did. Like several others who spoke today, I've actually been out in the world, done real things, seen what works and what doesn't, and learned from broad experiences. Others who spoke have equally substantial credentials and investments in the community. So, it just might be that folks like us have something to contribute.

In any case, your personal dig at those who disagree with you was totally irresponsible, inappropriate and offensive. It's this kind of treatment by our government that causes people to stay away and not participate in the process. Of course, if that's what you intended, slap yourself on the back because you certainly succeeded.

A few more "public hearings" like that will likely result in nobody showing up except you and the PCBA - but I guess that must be your point.

I would happy to sit down with you and discuss these issues if that would be useful."

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Posted **March 24, 2009 4:20:14 PM**

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« March 2009 »

Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat

						<u>1</u>
<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>16</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u>
<u>23</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>30</u>	<u>31</u>					

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- [November, 2008](#)
- [October, 2008](#)
- [September, 2008](#)
- [August, 2008](#)
- [July, 2008](#)
- [June, 2008](#)
- [May, 2008](#)
- [April, 2008](#)
- [March, 2008](#)
- [February, 2008](#)
- [January, 2008](#)
- [December, 2007](#)
- [November, 2007](#)
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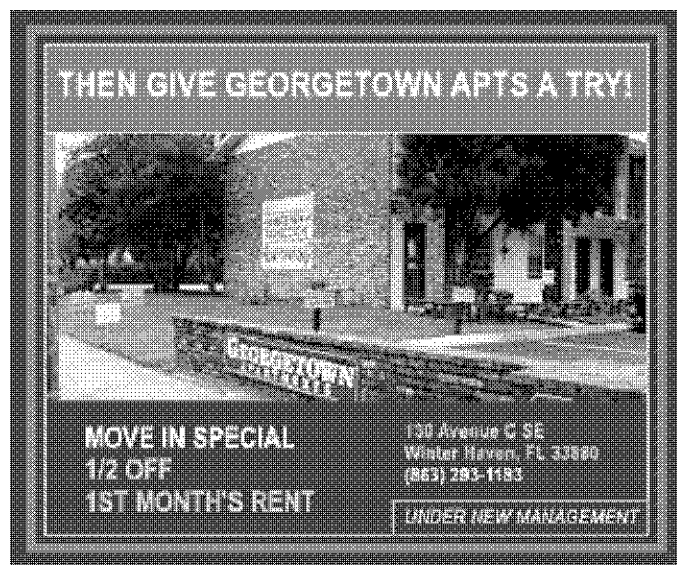
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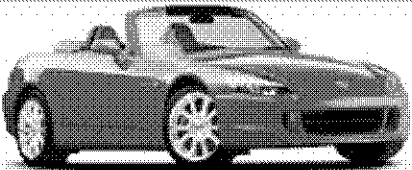
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