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Pay the price of no-growth ideals

By MATTHEW BIENIEK / Past Deadline

Jefferson Countians, prepare to pay more taxes.

And you can thank the no-growthers who now dominate public offices and commissions in Jefferson County. The no-growthers have shown their true colors over the past two years. For them, it's not a question of slow growth or smart growth. This group of true believers wants no growth — no growth at all. Jefferson County, in their eyes, will be the no-growth utopia of the mid-Atlantic.

And the true believers routinely smear anyone who doesn't agree with them — thankfully, there remain a few folks who will stand up and face the calumny usually heaped on anyone who dares question the party line.

The ridiculous decision on a development planned for the Old Standard Quarry is the latest blow the no-growth cabal has inflicted on the Jefferson County economy. In a few years, the impact of these decisions along with the defeat of table gaming, will hit the rest of the county's citizens hard.

It's already clear a large school bond is coming.

And with slowed housing growth and a planning commission that nips most new housing in the bud, impact fee revenue will probably dry up. Remember, impact fees only apply to new housing, not the sales of existing homes.

The Old Standard Quarry is partially a moonscape requiring cleanup of burnt limestone residue from the quarry operation. Piles of limestone are everywhere, some nearly three stories high. The quarry area is oddly enough currently zoned for high-density housing. Developers are requesting a zoning change to allow a commercial development at the site — specifically office buildings and a hotel. Twenty acres of the site would be set aside as parkland and for public fishing.

Federal officials rejected the property for facilities a few years ago in part because they didn't want to deal with the cleanup.

The Jefferson County Planning Commission rejected the zoning change last week. Developers are hoping the county commission, which has the final say, reverses that decision.

Jefferson County needs jobs in the county and a stronger tax base — the proposal for Old Standard would bring both.

Commission members said the project was not compatible with the county's comprehensive plan. Apparently this is the new justification no-growthers intend to use to stop any rational plan to build anything. Not compatible with certain aspects of the plan, that is, protecting natural viewpoints, historical sites and green space.

It should have been clear before now, but under this rationale, nothing in Jefferson County could be touched. And that indeed is the rationale — there is no smart growth plan. There is a no-growth plan.

Planning Commissioner Edward Dunleavy said "It was obvious ... it (the Old Standard proposal) was not consistent with the comprehensive plan."

"Obvious" because economic development is not in the lexicon of approved land uses in the no-growth little book of slogans. My favorite slogan is: "Save a battlefield, I don't want a development next to my property."

Perhaps if the developers planned high-density housing, the planning commission would like it better. Probably not.

We're talking about developers coming in and making something out of useless land. Of course, being developers, it must be part of some sinister plot, goes the logic of the no-growthers.

Delegate Bob Tabb, D-Jefferson, came out in support of the project because of the economic development possibilities. "If the county chooses not to move forward with projects like this, it makes it very difficult for me as a legislator to go to the state and say we need help."

And don't expect any help, when legislators from other areas can point to the Old Standard proposal and say that Jefferson County won't help itself. Most legislators in the state view the Eastern Panhandle anyway as a bunch of rich folks available for pillage.

Soon, the taxman in Jefferson County may well be saying "Let me tell you how it will be. There's one for you, nineteen for me"

And all because of people so locked into an unquestioned belief system that they can't even see good practical solutions to some of the county's problems when they are presented. Many of the no-growthers seem to be thinking that they've got theirs and now it's time to shut the door.

The door they're shutting will shut out the average citizens of the county, who will end up paying the highest price for the no-growth utopia.

— Matthew Bieniek is city editor of the Journal. He can be reached at (304) 263-3381, ext.137, or mbieniek@journal-news.net.

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