VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

For the animals' sake

I had the opportunity to attend the Nassau BOCC meeting on Aug. 25, primarily not to speak but to hear what was being said about the most recent debacle reported at the NCAS. After years of attending similar meetings, it was SSDD — that would be "same stuff, different day."

Upon entering the (commission) chambers, I noticed a formidable force lining the last row of seats. Perhaps more truth than poetry, as I was informed the next morning that more volunteers were let go by some invisible force.

Who indeed, e.g. volunteers, would make such disparaging allegations against their animal care leaders at NCAS if some of it, if not all of it, were not true? You know, we are not expecting to take the jobs from that formidable force, only asking them to do their jobs. How about the old "see something, say something?"

Of course, if you are concerned about being among those tossed to the curb, survival kicks in and the CYA protocol takes precedence. Let others be the sacrificial lambs as they pull back the curtain on what a negligent leadership is denying. Interesting way to recruit so desperately needed volunteers.

This is more than a shelter problem. This is a community problem. This is a failed leadership problem. This is an accountability problem.

How about no more excuses? How about interim solutions, regardless of grandiose plans for millions of dollars being tossed into a bone-shaped pool to which I am sure the animals are clueless? How about the fragmented ideas, concerns from the taxpayers band together to be a formidable force of their own?

After chatting with some about those ideas, I am convinced more fresh minds pulled together to address realistic options for improving what seems to be an unsurmountable speed bump for a failed leadership might get them off the mark for the sake of the welfare of our animals.

Rebecca Ayers
Friends of Animals in Nassau

Airport development up in the air

The airport development plan is being updated now. My question is, who is orchestrating what goes into that plan, which will lock in what "improvement" happens at the airport over the next 20 or so years, since there is no airport management?

There is a contract organization (FPO) at the airport that functions to fuel planes and clean the facility. Has this contractor assumed ministerial duties there? The city manager got rid of the airport advisory board which did function as a public advocate about airport operations albeit almost all members were pilots or airplane owners.

Perhaps a design company that builds airports is putting the plan together. So, where is any independent city resident input into a plan for the city airport?

Someone said or inferred at a recent city council meeting that the city airport is owned by the FAA. The FAA does not own FBMA.

One would think that council members who will be asked to approve a new airport development plan would be more informed about an operation that controls about 8% of city land while providing little to no money into city coffers because profits from airports subsidized by grants must be used at the airport to defray future needs for government grants. While following FAA rules, the city is the owner of the airport, not a regional, state, national authority or private enterprise.

Positive cash flow at the airport obfuscates airport viability. Inasmuch as this is a 20-year development plan, the city needs to consider for what purpose more development is needed.

Is it to increase travel to resorts that are not in the city? Is it to build more hangars? (How many city residents want hangars at the city airport?) Is it for better facilities so training companies from elsewhere can practice landing and takeoffs?

By my estimate, at least 50% of operations at the airport are training flights. Is any consideration given to the noise, pollution caused by leaded gas and unspent kerosene, and the potential for a mass casualty event?

The city manager and council should weigh the city need for further developing this facility besides following the advice of the hucksters holding out how beneficial an "improved" facility will be or those who look upon that facility as their personal fiefdom. We bought the economic augmentation argument 20 years ago.

After receiving grants for at least $10 million, we are not further along to achieving the goals of those exaggerated economic benefits to the city.

Vince Cavallo
Amelia Island

Why can't we be different?

Our warm, friendly, and charming island must remain that way! It makes no sense to change our wonderful island home into another typical money-making machine with every parking space just another "collection bag."

Just like most other small, mid-size, and even large cities and towns along the East Coast: Ft. Lauderdale, Myrtle Beach, Virginia Beach, Atlantic City, Ocean City — Make 'em Pay is their motto!

Our local merchants are the best, our medical care terrific, schools excellent, and of course our beaches beautiful. Fernandina Beach, my home town, is caring, accommodating, and easy to get around. Both tourists and residents love our town. Don't drive the tourists away, and keep our residents behind closed doors shopping on-line, or on the telephone. Over 50 great merchants make a living along Centre Street and the adjacent streets.

Why can't we keep our town free, open, and with tax-free parking. Use your minds, Commissioners, you know what your citizens of Fernandina Beach want!

Do you really want our police force spending their time walking the city streets and dishing out parking tickets to every car whose owners overstayed their welcome? Is our municipality so broke that we must ruin such a wonderful, special place to live?

When we first moved to Florida, I worked for a company based in Ft. Lauderdale. At first, we loved that mid-sized town with its beautiful beaches and ocean views. My family wanted to go to the beach every weekend. But it just didn't work; every parking space had an unfriendly parking meter staring you in the face. I spent most of my family beach time running back and forth to my car (if I had been lucky enough to find an empty parking spot) to pump more quarters in the hungry meter to catch another hour. A sad way to spend the afternoon.

After several years of beach parking hassles, we moved north to what turned out to be the perfect town — free, open, welcoming and caring. My family and I now plead with our city commissioners to change course and realize that paid-parking should not be the hallmark of Fernandina Beach.

Ken Fusch
Fernandina Beach

Protecting beaches means stop driving on sand

On Aug. 11, the County Commissioners met for their regular bimonthly meeting. Without prior notice and buried in the minutes, they voted to move the "No Driving Beyond This Point" sign from the state park to the South Beach Access Trail, about a mile and a half north.

This decision opened to vehicles some of the island's most pristine, wildlife-rich shoreline — an area that had been protected for 21 years.

This stretch of beach is already too narrow. At high tide, vehicles have no choice but to cross dunes and sea oats, destroying fragile plants that anchor the sand. Despite a costly renourishment project just four years ago — funded in large part by the very homeowners now exposed to traffic — the ecosystem is again at risk.

So why should the community care?

Some residents argue that past development was more harmful, that bulldozing dunes to build condos was worse than driving on the beach. Others claim wealthy owners are trying to limit access for ordinary people or ask simply, "Why take away the fun?"

But driving on a barrier island is not just another form of recreation. It has permanent consequences. Barrier islands are living, shifting systems — the first line of defense against hurricanes and storms. When vehicles compact the sand, dunes weaken, leaving both wildlife and homes more vulnerable. Tire tracks carve up nesting sites for endangered sea turtles and shorebirds. Hatchlings, already facing steep odds of survival, often die trapped in deep ruts. These are not inconveniences; they are irreversible harms.

Yes, past development decisions damaged the island. But repeating mistakes is no solution. If anything, we should be wiser than those who bulldozed dunes decades ago. Protecting what remains is not about nostalgia — it is about learning from history.

Ending beach driving does not mean ending beach access. Public lots and walkovers exist and can be expanded. Everyone still has the right to enjoy the sand, surf, and sunsets. The difference is whether we choose to enjoy them responsibly, without turning fragile shoreline into a roadway.

This issue is not "locals versus outsiders." It is not about politics, wealth or property lines. The question is simpler: Do we want to leave a healthy beach for future generations, or sacrifice it for the temporary thrill of driving across the sand? Once damaged, a barrier island cannot easily be restored.

The true joy of the beach — watching children run free, seeing a turtle nest hatch, feeling the dunes shift with the wind — does not come from behind the wheel of a truck. It comes from preserving a natural treasure that belongs to everyone.

Protecting our beaches is not exclusion. It is common sense. A barrier island is too fragile to serve as a highway. Ending beach driving is not punishment — it is a promise to the future.

Charlene Spiceland
Amelia Island

Hogs-4-Dawgs

For nearly 30 years, I have been a registered Republican in Nassau County, voting for each of our commissioners at least once. I have attended dozens of commission meetings, but the one on Aug. 25 left me questioning my party and voting record.

Citizens came expecting accountability. Instead, we got excuses, arrogance and insults.

Nine citizens raised serious concerns about Nassau County Animal Services: sweltering kennels without air conditioning, poor sanitation, disease outbreaks, chronic understaffing, overcrowding, ineffective marketing and the firing of volunteers who speak out. A former employee warned management about inappropriate behavior by a staff member toward a minor volunteer. Weeks later, that same staffer was arrested and charged with sexual battery on a minor — allegedly after hours inside the shelter.

Rather than address these issues, they got excuses. Commissioner Klynt Farmer dismissed citizens with condescension. He claimed he gets "40 to 50 emails a day" about NCAS. He bragged that at 46 he had been "running the family business for 41 years." He compared volunteers to "bad truck drivers" and sneered: "The loudest boos come from the cheapest seats, and I am not in the business of wallowing in the mud with a bunch of hogs."

The county's Employee Policies & Procedures Manual is clear: Section 2.01, 18.0: Engaging in offensive or disrespectful language and unprofessional conduct toward the public, on or off duty, is prohibited.

These remarks go beyond a Code of Conduct violation — they show blatant disrespect for the citizens who volunteer their time and energy to improve this county.

However, from this debacle came something positive: a name. We will proudly carry the banner of Hogs-4-Dawgs Rescue — an advocacy group that will not be silenced, intimidated or dismissed. We will continue fighting for the welfare of animals in Nassau County and for the respect our citizens deserve.

David J. Fashingbauer, DC
Fernandina Beach

HOW TO WRITE US ~

Letters must include writer's name, address and telephone number for verification. Writers are normally limited to one letter in a 30-day period. No political endorsements the week before an election. No poems will be published. Letters should be typed or printed. Not all letters are published.

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Mama and Papa didn't fill out surveys, deal with warnings

The survey from the doctor sometimes beats me home after an appointment.

"How did we do?" the message says via email. "Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey." I am paraphrasing, but you get the idea.

I order something online, the package arrives and then comes a similar request: "Please rate your experience (from one to five stars). Write a review."

It's good that doctors and companies want my feedback, but how many surveys do I need to fill out?

My grandparents, Mama and Papa Hudgins down on the farm, never got any surveys like that. Their doctor knew how well he did because he came to their house. Papa would've told him if he wasn't satisfied.

And when they ordered from Sears and Roebuck, they were happy when the package arrived without a following email. Of course, they didn't know what email was and for many years didn't have a telephone. Sears would have to send them a postcard survey.

Phil Hudgins

Just as important as the item ordered was the Sears catalog itself. My grandparents needed the paper on which the pictures of items were printed. Not as nice as Charmin, but it was OK in a pinch.

And, my goodness, the warnings we receive these days. The latest was about frozen, possibly radioactive shrimp being sold at Walmart. My grandparents wouldn't have worried. They didn't have Walmart, and they never ate shrimp. If it didn't come from a chicken or a cow or a hog, it was not the entrée on the Hudgins table.

If they had eaten shrimp, though, and it happened to be radioactive, they probably wouldn't have needed a lantern to walk gingerly at night toward the little house sheltering the Sears and Roebuck catalog.

How about those organic vegetables we're encouraged to buy. Papa Hudgins had never used the word "organic," but he knew cow manure when he saw it and used it in the garden. That made everything he grew organic.

What does the latest research say about eggs? At first, they were bad for you. Now, the Mayo Clinic Health System says that "most healthy people can eat up to seven eggs a week without affecting their heart health."

That's nice to know, but it's a little late. My parents-in-law, who owned a chicken hatchery, ate eggs — more than one — seven days a week, and they were cracked eggs, those that wouldn't hatch. That would not be recommended today.

How about those stupid labels on products today. On a carton of eggs, you might read this warning: "This product may contain eggs." No doubt the government at work.

Of course, it could've been that one person bought a carton of eggs thinking he was getting nuts and bolts to fix his lawnmower. This one unthinking person may have prompted the warning label.

My grandparents never owned a lawnmower. And they knew eggs contained eggs. Besides that, they knew where they came from. Not from a carton.

Phil Hudgins is the retired senior editor for Community Newspapers, Inc. that owns the News-Leader. Please contact him at phudgins@cninewspapers.com.