



David Lias
Between The Lines

Zoning discussion has happy ending

In a Solomon-like move, the Vermillion City Council did a good job of trying to satisfy everyone who has concerns about the rezoning from R-2 to R-1 of a residential neighborhood located two blocks from downtown. (See related story on page 1.)

There was a bit of a disturbing undertone in the discussion, however.

People who either reside in the neighborhood, or own residential property there initiated the zoning change. A petition was signed by 48 percent of the property owners, requesting that the zoning of the area be amended from its current R-2 residential to R-1 single family residential.

The primary difference between the two residential zoning districts is that R-2 allows multi-family structures of up to four dwellings, and R-1 is reserved for single family homes, and does not allow duplexes or four-plexes.

This neighborhood is located south of Kidder Street, between Church and Market streets. And, to interject complete transparency into this discussion, I must note my home is in that neighborhood, and my wife and I signed the petition in favor of the zoning change.

A factor that seemed to be, well, placed to one side during Monday's discussion at the city council meeting is the fact that it wasn't the city, it was nearly half of the people who live or own property in the neighborhood that initiated this action.

All the proper channels were followed. The petitions, and the desire to change the zoning, received the proper attention from the city's planning commission. I wasn't at that meeting, but it sounds like people both for and against the change were heard, with the commission ultimately deciding to recommend that the city council approve the zoning change.

People both for and against the change were heard Dec. 21, and after hearing that input, the council decided to give initial approval, in other words, give the okay to the first reading of the ordinance that allows the zoning change.

The matter came up for its second reading, or final approval, Monday. The process wasn't all that different from the Dec. 21 meeting. Once again, people both for and against the zoning change addressed the council.

During Monday's discussion, Alderman Mary Edelen, who had voted for the zoning change two weeks earlier, expressed misgivings about the change, arguing that things seem fine in the neighborhood the way they are right now, and that a zoning change really didn't seem necessary.

And at one point in the lengthy discussion, she noted that there was always the possibility that 10, 20, 30 years from now, that neighborhood, with its several grand, historic homes, may no longer be desirable to families. They could sit idle, empty, with their potential to become multi-family dwellings being unmet.

I guess talking about the future of the Vermillion community is always good, and pondering the demographics and trends of its citizenry can be an entertaining exercise.

I think what must always be remembered when we talk about this zoning issue – whether you are for it or against it – is that citizens brought this action. Not the city. The citizens followed all of the rules. The proper governing bodies were approached; the necessary public input was received.

Some of the concerns expressed by both those against and in favor of the zoning change are moot. The homes in the neighborhood that are currently multi-family retain that use, whatever the zoning. And, the residential area of town, which likely was developed not long after floods forced the city to relocate on the bluff, retains many of that era's characteristics. The yards are small; many of the driveways and alleys are narrow, reflecting that time.

In other words, there are a few homes that could be transformed into multi-family structures. But in many of the homes, such a use just isn't possible, unless city code is drastically changed to somehow squeeze every last drop of parking out of the small yards that surround some of the homes.

That's likely not going to happen.

The argument that families may one day not be attracted to the well-kept, historic homes in the neighborhood is, I must admit, a bit far-fetched. I respect Alderman Edelen a great deal, and recognize that she may genuinely be concerned about that. I must respectfully disagree with her, however. And I say this fully admitting that my home certainly isn't the most attractive in the neighborhood.

My wife and I have been investing, in the years we've lived in Vermillion, in the needs of our family more than our home. Yes, we mow our lawn and clear our sidewalks of snow. We plant flowers in the spring. We've thrown around a bit of paint here and there.

Our home, while not being a shack that's falling in on itself, is not the majestic, historic Gov. Lee residence. Or what's known as The Mayor's House, directly across the street from us. But it's home. One of the things that makes our place so inviting to our family is the beauty of the neighborhood.

When I contemplate what may happen in the future had the zoning not be changed, and, as Mary fears, the homes in our neighborhood may someday sit empty, I have my own mental scenario of what could occur.

Had the zoning not changed, leaving many of residences subject to being transformed into multi-housing units, it doesn't take a stretch of the imagination to picture what may happen.

All you have to do is drive by the residential areas in the vicinity of the USD campus and view the homes that have been converted to multi-use dwellings, and are primarily lived in by university students.

In some (not all) of those neighborhoods, it's not pretty. The homes, well, need some attention. The yards are often just weeds; the lack of pride of ownership is quite apparent. The residents of these homes really have no reason to have anything but the most fleeting investment in the property.

In these neighborhoods, homes are simply a roof over several students' heads.

I would hate it if that happened in my neighborhood. That's why I'm glad the city council found a way Monday to approve the zoning change and also fairly address the concerns of everyone involved.



Wanted: Readers who enjoy reading classified ads

Here are a few classified ads which I DON'T intend to use in a column.

You're welcome to them!

FOR SALE

Georgia peaches – California grown. 95 cents per pound.

Cows for sale – never bred; also one gay bull.

Nordic track, never used. Call Chubby.

Washer and dryer. Must sell, joining Nudist Colony.

Wedding dress for sale. Worn once by MISTAKE.

Complete set of Encyclopedia Britannica. Just married, wife knows it all.

Free puppies – one-half



Bob Karolevitz

Writer At Large

Cocker Spaniel – one half sneaky neighbor's dog.

Cute kitten for sale – two cents or best offer.

American flag – 60 stars. Pole included.

Snow blower. Only used when it snows.

Charmin Ultra Bathroom tissue – never used.

Nice parachute – never opened – used once.

American made doll clothing – manufactured in China.

Antique desk suitable for lady with thick legs and large drawers.

Three canaries of undetermined sex.

Dog for sale: eats anything and is fond of children.

Wanted: Man to take care of cow that does not smoke or drink.

Wanted: unmarried girls to pick fresh fruit and produce at night.

Sheer stockings. Designed for fancy dress, but so serviceable that lots of women wear nothing else.

Stock up and save. Limit one.

Built in double ovens – frost free.

Used tombstone: perfect for someone named Homer HendelBergenHenzel.

Now you can see why I'm willing to give these away! They aren't good for anything else.

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New Year says bye-bye racoon, squirrel, turkey neck

People have accused me of pedaling hope. I am proud of this accusation and the first to admit that I am guilty as charged.

Most likely, anyone could conclude this from reading my Christmas letter. There's not a bit of bad news in it, which may give many people the wrong impression. Believe me; my life is far from perfect.

That's why every year at this time I write about what happened between the lines of my holiday letter. Here goes...

Last January, I started the year with surgery to remove benign ovarian cysts. I took two weeks off from work but should have taken three. After returning to my job, I ended up with the worst cases of sinus infection and bronchitis and had to take two rounds of antibiotics to get well.

This past summer, the vegetable garden was a flop, again. We had some decent cherry tomatoes, but everything else was a complete disaster. It was the most miserable looking vegetable garden this side of the Mississippi.

Our shoreline eroded another foot this year, which is due to too many high-speed boats racing up and down our tiny lake. I'd like to hire a contractor to stabilize the bank, but Brian thinks it will cost too much, probably about \$15,000.

This is coming from a man who for a brief spell considered having plastic surgery on his turkey neck. Here's the funny part: he thinks the bill would be right around \$5,000. If he only knew the real cost of plastic surgery, he would say, "Hello, turtle-necks, bye-bye turkey neck."

MyStory YourStory



Paula Damon

Columnist

I decided to go all out in 2009 by taking name brand vitamins for women over the age of 50, instead of generic ones. I figured that at age 57 I'm worth it.

We had pouring down rain on all but two days of our fall vacation.

I went through a passage of sorts. Out of utter frustration over always losing my reading glasses, I very abruptly started wearing a glasses chain and started washing away more of my gray with ash blond. Go figure.

In November, Brian broke his right ring finger to go with the left ring finger he broke last summer. This latest break was when he started a mini-remodeling project on our kitchen, which caused my OCD to flare up. (I thought the kitchen was fine the way it was.)

We had some run-ins with nature in 2009.

A raccoon decided that the inside of our house would make a better home than the outside of our house. So, late one night, he (or she) climbed up the downspout, tiptoed across the roof, pried open the cupola and settled in for a long winter's nap, or so the raccoon thought. Brian added some mesh over the vents and that ended that.

Just last week, two of our three Dachshunds caught and killed a squirrel in our yard. It must have been a very slow squirrel or a very stupid one, because with our Dachshunds' short stubby

legs, we're still wondering how in the world this all happened.

Unfortunately, by the time we arrived at the scene, it was too late. Fighting to the very end, that squirrel did not go down easily.

Zoe suffered five lacerations to the snout; Poe ended up with three and there was blood everywhere.

Both dogs landed in the veterinarian's clinic for damage control and received shots to ward off infections. And now, I have a \$148 bill to pay all because of a squirrel.

Even though these things

occurred in 2009, I'd like to think that it was a pretty good year.

It amazes me, though, how much I really do leave out of my Christmas letters. It's probably for the best.

A resident of Southeast South Dakota, Paula Damon is a national award-winning columnist. Her columns have won first-place in National Federation of Press Women, South Dakota Press Women and Iowa Press Women Communications Contests. In the 2009 South Dakota Press Women Communications Contest, Paula's columns took three first-place awards. To contact Paula, email pauladamon@iw.net, follow her blog at www.my-story-your-story.blogspot.com and find her on Facebook.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Plain Talk encourages its readers to write letters to the editor, and it asks that a few simple guidelines be followed.

■ Please limit letters to 350 words or less. Letters should deal with a single subject, be of general interest and state a specific point of view. Letters are edited with brevity, clarity and newspaper style in mind.

■ In the sense of fairness and professionalism, the Plain Talk will accept no letters attacking private individuals or businesses.

■ Specific individuals or entities addressed in letters may be given the opportunity to read the letter prior to publication and be allowed to answer the letter in the same issue.

Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted. Please mail to: Letters, P.O. Box 357, Vermillion, SD 57069, or e-mail us at david.lias@plaintalk.net.

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