

Bluffton Opinion

When Life is Fair: Joe Croley

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When life is fair, the Beaufort County Council will be credited with refuting Lori Borgman's wonderful article titled "The Death of Common Sense." In her essay, Borgman states that common sense develops sound financial policies such as "don't spend more than you earn," or in the Beaufort County Council's case, "don't raise taxes on citizens who don't have any money."

During their sessions on Monday, two opportunities to raise taxes on their constituents were both rejected.

The first came when a committee reviewed two appraisals for the Beaufort Commerce Park, located along U.S. 21 near the Marine Corp Air Station.

After twice passing a resolution approving the purchase of this piece of property for approximately \$2.5 million and then in reverse order receiving an outside opinion of the value of park, the committee voted against borrowing funds that would increase the debt millage on your property tax bill a year or so in the future.

After one appraisal came in about 35 percent lower than the almost-approved purchase price and the expert making the estimate stated that he didn't even think that industrial development was the best use of the property for various reasons, common sense resurrected itself from the grave as committee members forwarded a resolution to the full council that was passed later in the evening, virtually assuring the end to this questionable venture for the time being.

I say for the time being because even ill-conceived ideas, like vampires, are sometimes difficult to kill.

But all of that debate was just a warm-up for the main event of the evening, which was council's approval on first reading of the school district's proposed budget. Although the budget submitted was technically flat as compared to last year's expenditures, it would necessitate a 3 percent tax increase on the operation millage to be approved due to yet-to-be-determined tax collections and legislation making its way through the State House in Columbia that may or may not add funds to the district's coffers.

With the tsunami of reassessment looming that will dictate property values based on Dec. 31, 2012, estimates, County Council has correctly recognized that flat budgets will not cut it today or prepare governmental entities for the drastic decreases in revenue sure to come.

They have already reviewed a reduced operations budget for the county itself and after some political posturing overwhelmingly passed an ordinance mandating no tax increase for the school district. Hip, hip, hooray.

Moreover, to complete the triple play in support of common sense, council unanimously passed an ordinance enhancing the current stormwater regulations thus increasing the hope of protecting our rivers and streams.

All in all, it was very good night for common sense and Beaufort County taxpayers.

In the meantime, you can contact **Joe Croley** at whenlifeisfair@hargray.com