

opinion

NEWS
Mary Kelli Palka
Editor

Mark Nusbaum, President

EDITORIAL BOARD
Nusbaum, Denton, Clark, Bobby Martin,
Roger Brown, Paula Horvath and
citizen editorial members.

EDITORIAL
Frank M. Denton
Editor At Large
Michael P. Clark
Editorial Page Editor

A VERSE FOR TODAY
Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but
what is good. ...
3 John 1:11

Housing for homeless requires action

Federal action against the city for turning down an apartment project designed especially for homeless veterans was long foreshadowed.

The U.S. Justice Department's civil rights division recently asked for an injunction to stop the city from enforcing part of the zoning code the department says discriminates against people with disabilities.

The Justice Department's requested injunction followed the receipt of more than 30,000 pages of documents from the city of Jacksonville as part of an investigation.

This is just the latest legal action in a controversy that goes back more than two years. Confidential mediation is taking place at the moment, Ability Housing CEO Shannon Nazworth said.

THE NIMBY EFFECT

At issue is simply a 12-unit apartment complex in Springfield that the respected nonprofit Ability Housing wanted to use for homeless veterans, many with disabilities.

Opposition from Springfield residents has sometimes been fierce in part because the residents are trying to overcome an abundance of such social service projects in their neighborhood.

But a few critics have projected every fear of the disabled and mentally ill on the proposed 12 residents — stigmas and stereotypes in action.

The result has been the ultimate example of the NIMBY effect — Not in My Back Yard.

Ability Housing won a grant from the state for the project and then witnessed

an uprising of Springfield residents.

In fact, a special zoning overlay for Springfield was cited for the denial of the units that city planners interpreted as a kind of group home.

Ability Housing representatives disagreed with the zoning ruling. Their lawsuit contends the real reason the housing was turned down was due to the nature of the residents and thus violates the federal Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Springfield location was chosen in part because it is close to the Jacksonville Outpatient Clinic for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Residents of the 12 units were going to be homeless veterans for the most part.

LESSONS FROM NEW ORLEANS

Now that legal action is underway, it is instructive to see what happened in New Orleans under similar circumstances.

The settlement agreement in New Orleans spelled out these facts:

- The U.S. sued in 2012 against the city of New Orleans under the Americans with Disabilities Act for discriminating against people with disabilities in land use and zoning decisions.
- At issue was the conversion of an abandoned nursing home into a 40-unit affordable housing development for low-income people; half of them would be homeless people with disabilities that includes veterans and emancipated youth.
- The settlement in 2014 stated that opposition to development was "based on fear and stereotypes of its prospective residents with disabilities."
- As part of the settlement agreement,

the city of New Orleans agreed not to discriminate in housing due to disability.

• In addition to allowing the 40-unit complex to go forward, New Orleans had to amend its zoning code to make clear that permanent supportive housing is permitted in any zone where multi-family housing is permitted.

• City staff had to submit to training by a third party on fair housing issues.

• And the kicker, New Orleans had to fund 350 additional permanent supportive housing units.

The Jacksonville case is stunningly similar to the New Orleans precedent.

And while Jacksonville officials have insisted that this is not a case of discrimination, many of the fears expressed by residents at a public meeting were rife with stereotypes.

HOUSING FIRST

The "housing first" strategy has been shown to be a key to successfully moving homeless or people with disabilities to successful, productive lives.

Yet a shortage of affordable housing is a major roadblock.

True, Springfield should not carry the entire burden of housing the homeless. Jacksonville is a huge city in land mass, and many other places can be found.

But this 12-unit complex is not going to bring down Springfield, either. And it makes sense to locate veterans near the VA Clinic.

Ability Housing representatives have expressed eagerness to negotiate all along, so it is unfortunate the court action and federal investigation were necessary.

But that, sadly, is the case.

U.S. HAS D GRADE ON HOMELESS

The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty has recorded slipping grades in the nation's response to homelessness.

From Security of 2016 report card:

- **Renters:** F grade
- **Homeowners:** D grade
- **Affordability:** F grade
- **Accessibility:** B-minus

QUOTE FROM THE REPORT

"In 2016 the United States continued to face a crisis of homelessness brought on by a severe shortage of affordable housing."

FAST FACTS

- About 1.4 million school children were homeless in 2013-14.
- Numbers of homeless school children have almost doubled since the recession of 2007.
- The number of people who lost their homes or doubled up with family or friends is 52 percent higher than before the recession.
- Many communities have responded not with more housing but by enforcing laws that criminalize homelessness.
- In 1948, the U.S. was an international leader in promoting the human right to housing.
- In 1949, the Federal Housing Act stated a goal of "a decent home and suitable living arrangement for every American family" but that never became law.

Police-fire pension plan

Reform plan doesn't need big repairs

In his recent reply to my letter, Mayor Lenny Curry misstated certain facts about his police and fire pension proposal, and fails to address his plan's most important flaw.

The mayor first asserts that it costs 119.6 percent of a plan member's salary to pay for the recently revised pension plan, rather than the 10 percent I referenced. But the mayor's 119 percent figure isn't the cost of the revised plan; it was last year's cost for all employees, not just the few who were hired since the 2015 pension revisions.

It therefore includes the costs of addressing the decades of mismanagement and unfunded generous benefits that the 2015 plan reformed.

The 2015 plan was designed by a community task force to cost the city less than 10 percent per employee for those hired after July 2015 assuming an average rate of return — far less than the mayor's proposal.

Secondly, the mayor states that the pension referendum (which I publicly supported) requires elimination of all pension plans when in reality it only requires closing one. Few referendum voters could have realized that the one plan the mayor would focus on abolishing would be the one the task force spent so much effort to render cost-effective and efficient.

The mayor then suggests that switching to his plan will prevent taxpayers from having to pay the same 119 percent. That's simply not correct.

His 119 percent cost will go down when the lower costs for post-2015 employees is factored in. Still, the city is legally bound to pay for the greater costs of the previous plan.

The mayor wants to delay payment until the new sales tax begins in 2030, and it is true that the referendum requires closing at least one plan to do so. But in closing a plan, we need to make sure that we are closing the right one and aren't choosing a much more expensive option.

The greatest omission is the mayor's failure to explain how his more expensive plan will stem turnover and retain public safety officers in the future.

There is no evidence that his plan would achieve such goals, and if it fails to do so, it will create substantial additional costs for taxpayers while leading to the weakening of our police and fire departments.

Tad DeGalel, Jacksonville

LETTER POLICY

Letters of about 200 words are preferred. Letters are edited for space, clarity and newspaper style. Include a name, address, occupation and telephone number.

Email is preferred:

letters@jacksonville.com
Mail: Letters From Readers
The Florida Times-Union
P.O. Box 1949
Jacksonville, FL 32231

Another view: Tom Stiglich Creators Syndicate



Letters from Readers

ELECTORAL COLLEGE

AMENDMENT PROCESS

Much has been written about the unfairness of the Electoral College process, one that has served us well for over two centuries.

The Constitution clearly lays out the process. If it needs changing, then take the steps needed to amend the Constitution.

Have the necessary three-fourths of the states approve the amendment and have them do that within the prescribed time frame.

Then have both houses of Congress approve it by a two-thirds vote of the members present (providing there is a quorum). So if a change is needed, it's best to get started. As an aside, changing Election Day will also require a constitutional amendment.

On another front, photo IDs often are needed to get a doctor's appointment, to get a library card, to get a prescription, to board an airplane or enter a federal building.

Are those requirements discriminatory?
S. P. Braud III, Ponte Vedra Beach

ELECTION CHANGES

NOT NEEDED

I disagree with most of the reforms to elections proposed by Jack Bernard.

I was born in 1947 and I recall national elections having been held on a Tuesday in November. That's pretty much etched in stone.

If mandating early voting was not complied with, what would the penalty be?

As for instituting automatic registration at birth, if people want to vote let them take the initiative to register. It's not a function of government to make sure that people are registered.

As for requiring photo IDs, that should be required without exception. Obtaining an ID is not impossible or a financial burden as some claim. It's a ruse perpetrated by liberal lawyers, the NAACP and the

Democratic Party as a whole.

Voting is important, and having knowledge of the issues is essential. But the individual needs to take the initiative and put forth the effort and quit thinking that a lot of things should be easy.

Raymond K. (Bud) Smith,
Blackshear, Ga.

TRUMP AND CHINA

PRACTICING, PREACHING

While Donald Trump continues to call out American companies that manufacture their products overseas, he likes to take credit for new manufacturing plants already in progress and jobs created before he was elected.

He does not practice what he preaches.

Here are Trump products made in China:

- \$80 sweaters.
- \$70 warm up tops.
- \$69 dress shirts.
- \$22 tie pins.

No wonder he loves the uninformed. Ford, Chevy and others should simply tell him when he brings his products home, we will follow.

It's time he shows America his taxes.

For the first time in 72 years of life, I have no president.

Rick Mansfield, Ponte Vedra Beach

TRUMP AND GOP

BACK TO 1920

Earlier in the presidential campaign, I wrote a letter to The Florida Times-Union stating that Donald Trump's policies would take us back to the 1920s.

The 20s were characterized by xenophobia, racism, tariff wars and tax breaks for the rich. Thanks to Trump supporters (including the Times-Union editorial page) and Trump voters, Trump and Republicans have been given political power they have not enjoyed since the 1920s.

Republicans then and now control the executive branch and both houses of Congress. His Supreme Court appoint-

ments will give Republicans control of the judiciary as well. Not to mention that his Cabinet will be the most conservative since 1928.

Republican policies of the 1920s led to the Great Depression. I'm shocked that we have put them in the position to take us over the cliff again.

Scott Brackett, Fleming Island

MEDIA BIAS

FOCUSED ON TRUMP

I found the opinion column by Petula Dvorak of The Washington Post to be interesting.

She points out the so-called lies put forth by Donald Trump. Conversely, she fails to mention any of the lies put forth by her darling Hillary Clinton. Media bias? Nah, never.

W. C. Holcomb, Waycross, Ga.

MELISSA NELSON

HOW ABOUT VICTIMS?

In the Times-Union's front page article regarding new State Attorney Melissa Nelson, there are five changes outlined that she wants to accomplish.

All five of the bulleted changes appear to revolve around the rights or severity of sentencing of the people charged or convicted of a crime.

It would have been nice to see a sixth bullet outlining Nelson's thoughts and concerns for the rights of the victims of the crimes that those people committed.

Bill Boutwell, Jacksonville

SHIRK'S PRACTICES

LESSONS FOR FUTURE

Thanks for the front page article describing the fine work of our "public servant" former Public Defender Matt Shirk.

This raises a great question: What can we and our legislators do to make sure someone like him does not waste so many of our tax dollars again?

Rich Horvath, Ponte Vedra Beach