



Opinion

Editorial

Too much history not always a good thing

A planned new landmarks and historic preservation for Ladysmith as originally drafted would not give property owners the ability to opt out if nominated and approved. A week after facing intense public criticism over the proposal, city officials might be ready to rethink its once uncompromising position.

A city official confirmed this language would not remain in the 8-page document if it was brought back for reconsideration after being tabled by the city council last week amid backlash at a public hearing.

Chalk this up as a win for all those city residents who pay property taxes that fund local government — at least for now. Just remember, government has a way of making things happen that it wants to happen.

The Ladysmith draft document is modeled after a similar municipal ordinance in Lodi, about a half-hour drive north of Madison. Ask people around here their opinion of the state capital, and you are sure to get an earful.

On a drive through Ladysmith, you'll quickly notice many iconic landmarks.

You'll notice the Masonic Lodge that was once the home of Menasha Wood-ward Company leader Charles Smith, who was successful in renaming the city "Ladysmith" in honor of his bride on July 1, 1900. This building has seen construction work reduce some of its stately grandeur such as replacement of a classic clay tile roof with modern asphalt shingles.

You'll notice the iconic Gerard Motel that once welcomed its most distinguished guest, Thomas Marshall, Vice President of the United States under Woodrow Wilson. Marshall stayed at the Gerard while in Ladysmith to give an Armistice Day speech in 1920. The structure is now dark after recent problems with the heating system.

You'll notice the former State Bank of Ladysmith, a unique structure downtown constructed in 1912. The two-story granite-faced building has a Neoclassical design and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Its interior was recently remodeled, then the building shut down soon after it opened.

You'll notice the former Methodist Church downtown is gone. Church leaders abandoned the structure after it was severely battered by a tornado, selling it for \$1. The new owner sold off the building's stained glass windows. Water seeped in through wall and roof openings. Pigeons entered, causing further destruction. Finally, unceremoniously, when no one wanted any more to do with it, the county tore the building down and turned the site into a parking lot.

Where was all the historic preservation talk when the church was going down? Few people want to talk historic preservation when they are the ones on the hook for the bills. If you are the owner of a property that could be listed as historic by a commission made up of non-elected individuals, you may want

to take notice. When homeowners in historic districts want to replace certain windows, install a new roof or add a porch, they must obtain approval from a small government body that decides if the changes are sympathetic to the historic character of the property. The same goes for businesses that wish to expand or add on to a historic building.

In a city that has been around as long as Ladysmith has, something historic could be said about any property. The longer the history, the harder it is to change. A historical preservation commission is more than likely going to deny property owners' requests in order to block specific, likely unpopular, development plans.

In 2015, state Rep. Scott Allen (R-Waukesha), chair of the Assembly Committee on Community Development, co-authored a bill to address the issue. His legislation, which became law, requires local governments to notify property owners who would be affected by a proposed historic designation and hold public hearings before new properties or neighborhoods are designated.

In the majority of cases, historic preservation requests will not come from others, not the actual property owners.

Not all forms of historic preservation come with such strict guidelines. In fact, the state and national registries are both "honorary" programs, meaning property owners do not need government approval to make changes to the properties. There are over 90,000 properties on the National Register of Historic Places, which says it is the "official list" of the nation's historic sites. In Wisconsin, there are about 2,500 historic state and/or national properties. Unless there are tax credits attached to the sites, owners do not need permission to make changes to their properties. That's why so many local historic preservation commissions are used to protect properties through historic designation.

There is certainly value in historic preservation, but something old is not always worth saving. For instance, city officials didn't hesitate a couple years ago to remove an open air pavilion with an art-deco roofline from Memorial Park and replace it with a new massive log frame structure. So much for history. What is needed most is protection for property owners in the form of an essential veto: If owners oppose the designation or if two-thirds of property owners oppose the designation of a historic district that includes their homes, the designation would not pass.

This is a democratic society. It is shocking to see tiny commissions of non-elected individuals be so empowered they can unilaterally make decisions for what property owners can do with property they bought, property they own and property for which they pay taxes.

Ladysmith News editorials are written by news staff.

Letters

This reader believes people do more harm than good by fearing each other

FDR in one of his fireside chats stated "we only have to fear: fear itself. It seems to me that we as a nation are fearing fear itself."

According to Forbes magazine (a non-partisan business publication) there were nearly 20 million guns purchased in the US in 2022. According to a Gallup Poll conducted in Aug of

2019 roughly 63% of gun owners stated they owned a firearm for personal protection. If this figure is at all accurate nearly two thirds of all gun owners fear for their safety.

My question is who do we fear and why? It seems to me a partial answer to the question is: fear of the other. It is persons and organi-

zations who look, act, think, vote and worship differently than us. Another question that arises is: should we fear these persons/organizations? My answer: I think not. It seems to me we do more harm than good by fearing the other!

**Dennis Macklin
Holcombe**

Asks how can American patriot love his country, a fervent Christian love his church

How can an American patriot love his country and not its people? One might as well ask, how can a fervent Christian love his Church and not serve his fellow man, his brothers and sisters.

In either case, the loyalist would be hypo-

critical, sanctimonious. He would be wrapping himself in a stolen garb, reserving to himself privilege and access that should be extended to cover all, his act a sham of noble devotion, attending to the comfort and security of self while leaving others exposed to cold and peril.

Be they patriot or Christian, wholeness and the welfare of all must be their aim, their pledge. Else they stand as "whited sepulchers... full of dead men's bones."

**Michael Doran
Ladysmith**

Expresses appreciation to city work crew that filled street potholes in Ladysmith

I want to take this time to thank the young gentlemen who filled the potholes on E. Ninth Street S on Thursday morning.

It took them at least one hour. They did fantastic work.

We are so lucky to have such great summer help.

Thank you again.

**Al and Deb Hraban
Ladysmith**

The Capitol Report

Breaking the fever of hate is everyone's job

I read. A lot. Newspapers, of course. Magazines. Books, lots of books. Fiction and nonfiction. Print or digital. Whatever is handy.

Now and then I've written about a particularly interesting reading experience and so I will again today. At the end, I'll attach a brief recommended reading list. The intent is to suggest, for those who believe we're in an unprecedented time of divisiveness and hate, that maybe we've been here before and managed, with great effort, to find a better way.

Today's featured book: A Fever in the Heartland, by Timothy Egan. Subtitle: The Ku Klux Klan's Plot to Take Over America, and the Woman Who Stopped Them.

As kids in school, most of us learned the Civil War was fought to free slaves in southern states. After northern victory, the Klan briefly rose in a spasm of racial violence. Federal troops hounded the Klan out of existence. The march of progress, slowly at times, moved ahead.

Not exactly. The north won. Slavery was abolished. But with Lincoln's assassination his scoundrel vice president, Andrew Johnson, succeeded him

and looked the other way as former confederates rebuilt racial barriers by any means necessary. The Ku Klux Klan rose as night riders, terrorizing the Black population. The violence continued and rights were crushed until Ulysses Grant became president and sent in troops. But when Grant left the White House Rutherford B. Hayes succeeded him, in a contested election, which involved cutting a deal to remove troops — essentially ending reconstruction and ushering in the rule of Jim Crow laws that locked in second class status based on race.

Egan's book deals with the revival of the Klan in the 1920s. Following World War I an era of change occurred. Prohibition played a role. Suddenly millions of people were breaking the law with bootleg booze at speakeasies. Women were wearing bobbed hairstyles, short skirts and dancing. Blacks were moving north to seek opportunities in industry. Heightened immigration brought in new populations. Many of them worshiped differently — Catholics, Jews.

And the Klan rose again, touting a message that White Protestant morals were under attack. The old hate of Blacks was front and center, but the new Klan left plenty of room to hate the Irish, the Italians, Asians, Jews, Catholics and others.

I was fascinated to read Fever in the Heartland because it's largely based in southern and central Indiana, which

became Ground Zero for the new Klan. Much of the action takes place in or around Indianapolis, including places like Terre Haute. I grew up 90 miles from Indy and 30 miles from Terre Haute. As a kid I heard stories of how the Klan took root throughout the region in the 1920s, how thousands of young men in the largely rural population joined. It also was said that just as quickly as the joining took place, it ended for reasons left unclear.

Fever in the Heartland answers a lot of those questions. Indiana became corrupted with the Klan controlling local and state government. But when Klan leaders were shown to be what they were — grifters, moral degenerates, liars and cheats — the fever broke and followers retired their robes. I won't spoil the rest of the story, of a woman wronged by Indiana's Klan boss speaking truth from the grave.

The point: Hate is always there. Its mortal enemy is truth. And, often belatedly, the goodness in decent people's hearts. Americans have beat hate before. They can beat it again.

As promised, a brief reading list on similar topics:

- Killers of the Flower Moon, by David Grann. When oil was discovered on what was believed to be useless land occupied by the Osage, members of the tribe stood to become fabulously wealthy. Instead, they were targeted for exploitation while authorities looked the other way. Murder was the most efficient tool. The case marked the emergence of the fledgling FBI, to bring at least some justice for the victims.
- 1491, by Charles Mann. The date in the title suggests the content

to follow, because it's one year before the arrival of Christopher Columbus to "discover" the Americas. Mann's purpose is to report on a land that was not empty, but rather populated by millions of people now referred to as Native Americans. The result of "discovery," as one might surmise, did not turn out well for those who were already here.

- Blood and Thunder, the Epic Story of Kit Carson and the Conquest of the American West, by Hampton Sides. The story fairly presents the widely differing versions of history surrounding western expansion. The incredible persistence and heroism of people like Carson, the most famous and accomplished mountain man and guide through the wilderness. The sad and violent displacement of native people who were in the way. The taking of Mexican territory that was the culmination of a vision of America's manifest destiny to become a continental nation.

- The Man Who Saved the Union, Ulysses Grant in War and Peace, by H.W. Brands. Warts and all, a presentation of Grant's career as the determined general who bled the south into submission and later brought the same will to the effort to win the peace.

History is a guide, if we're willing to see it. And hate is not new, but rather an ever-present challenge to overcome.

To learn more, read.

Bill Barth is the former Editor of the Beloit Daily News and a member of the Wisconsin Newspaper Hall of Fame. Write to him at bbarth@beloit-dailynews.com.



Bill Barth

precedented time of divisiveness and hate, that maybe we've been here before and managed, with great effort, to find a better way.

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Letters to the editor

All letters to the editor must be signed and the writer's name will be printed. The writer's full address and telephone number must be included on all letters.

Names will not be withheld. All material submitted must be original. Poetry and "thank you" letters will not be accepted.

Letters may be 500 words or less. Only one letter every four weeks will be accepted from any group, organization or individual. The *Ladysmith News* may edit letters and limit responses. The deadline for letters is 5 p.m. Monday for that week's paper.

Letters promoting specific candidates will not be run the week prior to an election.

Letters may be mailed to Ladysmith News, P.O. Box 189, Ladysmith, WI 54848, or e-mailed to editor@ladysmithnews.com.

On-line poll

(Last week's question and result)

Do you know anyone who operates a dairy farm?

● 79.5% Yes

● 6.8% No

● 13.6% Not sure

To vote on this week's new poll question:

Do you recreate on Rusk County waterways?

go to www.ladysmithnews.com