

2/3/12

Thanks to what can only be called a dirty trick, whether or not Saipan's landscape becomes a mess or keeps its renowned and widely-admired natural beauty is now up to the governor. Saipan's zoning law, up before the local delegation for a vote on revisions crafted by the Zoning Board, was eviscerated by an amendment submitted by Stanley Torres that would turn most of the island into either village or mixed commercial zones. The amendment was introduced from the floor - apparently without prior notice to either fellow law-makers or the Board, and without opportunity for comment by Zoning Board members.

The amendment would make an area of 350 feet on either side of almost all paved roads on Saipan (with the exception of DanDan Road, Route 304) mixed commercial, allowing night clubs, auto repair and pawn shops, warehouses and factories - in fact, everything but certain heavy industrial uses, adult businesses and poker machines - along what amounts to a 700-foot corridor on all major roads on Saipan.

As if that weren't bad enough, the amendment also changes the zoning of most of Navy Hill, and parts of Capitol Hill, the Ste Lourdes area, China Town and Oleia, among others, into mixed commercial as well. The amendment also calls for almost all of Tanapag to become mixed commercial, instead of rural.

Torres' floor amendment was passed by the Saipan and Northern Island delegation, with only four members voting no: Delegation Chairman Ray Tebuteb, and members Felicidad Ogumoro, Ray Basa and Edmund Villagomez. The bill now goes to the governor for action.

The governor could veto the bill in its entirety - which would be a shame, because it also contained numerous changes that the Zoning Board had been arduously working on for months to bring the law into closer alliance with community interests. Or, possibly, he could just veto that part of the bill that encompasses Torres' amendments. He has forty days, according to the Constitution, to act on the bill - enough time for all those who support orderly development, who believe Saipan's value lies in its beauty and attractiveness, who do not want to see every road become commercialized as Middle Road is, to let the governor - and his circle of advisors - know of their concerns. However, the ultimate - and fateful - decision is in the hands of the governor.

\*\*\*

Whoever decided that CHC's Family Care Clinic should be moved to its present location in the new wing wouldn't seem to know very much about accommodating traffic flow patterns or the clinic's users/patients. The Clinic's main entrance is on an incline that faces Navy Hill Road. One wonders why an entrance was placed there to begin with, since there is no reasonably nearby parking whatsoever. There are parking spaces at the foot of the incline, but those are meant for the administrative entrance to the building, facing Middle Road. There are parking spaces around the corner. But in both cases, they are considerably further away from the entrance to the present family care clinic than they were to where it was formerly located.

Most patients may be ambulatory, but they are suffering from something or other or they wouldn't be coming to the clinic. Yet they are expected to either walk a fair distance up an incline, or walk a fair distance from around the corner, or a fair distance from within the building, to get to the Clinic. For someone not feeling well, it's tortuous.

It is especially difficult for patients with a disability. In fact, it's nearly impossible. Even if one parks in the handicapped spot on the other side, in the "upper" parking area, and enters the

building through the hemodialysis entrance (a shorter, easier walk from car to entrance), it's a long walk from there to the Family Care Clinic, which is on the other side of the building. In fact, the whole driveway pattern for the new wing would seem awkward, poorly designed. The road is very narrow, and the curves are very sharp. How the road, or the entrance, or the re-location of the family clinic, could have ever been approved by anyone - hospital officials, funding agents or engineers - is unfathomable.

However, since it's fairly obvious that there isn't the funding to re-do the whole thing, other than moving the family clinic elsewhere, the only solution that comes to mind is to provide complimentary valet service to clients/patients of the Family Care Clinic - at the very least to the those who are disabled - who arrive unaccompanied. Let the client/patient drive up to the entrance to the Clinic, and have CHC provide someone to drive the car away and park it - and to retrieve it when the client/patient is ready to leave. Unheard of? Maybe. But a solution? Yes! - and a far less costly one than re-doing the whole road, adding more convenient parking spaces, moving the clinic.....

\*\*\*

Earlier this week the *Saipan Tribune* ran a longish press release issued by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community announcing the availability of information sheets from SPC that are designed to help fishermen manage and sustain the marine life on which their livelihood depends.

What it didn't spell out is that separate sheets are available for coconut crabs, spiny lobsters, trochus, octopuses, sea cucumbers, surgeonfish, reef snappers, parrotfish, rabbit fish, and groupers, among others. Each sheet provides information on the species and its distribution, on its habitats and feeding patterns, on its reproduction and life cycle, on fishing methods, and on management measures and options. The colorful and informative sheets can be downloaded separately, or all together as a single file, at <

<http://www.spc.int/coastfish/en/component/content/article/393-guide-and-information-sheets-for-fishing-communities.html> >.

\*\*\*

Short takes: - The *Marianas Variety* reported earlier this week that the chairman of the Senate Committee on Utilities, Communications and Transportation was not happy about the looming CUC rate increases, and had vowed to look into it. One wonders where he was during the many meetings of the Commonwealth Public Utilities Corporation at which the rate increases were discussed, during the public hearing that was just held on the same subject. Now that increases have been decided upon, he is going to "look into it"? Isn't that a little late?

- One element missing from the talk going around that maybe the CNMI ought to allow the hotels, golf courses, to buy the land their facilities sit on, is any discussion of (a) why those companies would want to do so, and (b) what the expected purchase prices would be. Over many years, the hotels and golf courses have already paid, or are paying, fees to lease those properties. How much more does the CNMI think they'd be willing to pay? And why? Has anyone talked to them?

- Who's more appropriately dressed - U.S. Assistant Secretary for Insular Affairs Tony Babauta, or CNMI's governor Fitial, Commerce Secretary Sixto Igisomar? In a photo on the front page of

Wednesday's *Tribune*, all three are wearing long-sleeved shirts, (an indication that the air conditioning is set too cold), but unlike the other two, Babauta is not wearing a tie. My vote goes to Babauta, for recognizing that island wear doesn't call for neckties.

- Since former CHC Secretary Joseph K. Villagomez - for whatever reason - chose not to exercise the option to separate out some functions of the Health Center from the Corporation, what is the point of doing so now? Apparently, the administration wants to separate out "public health care" programs. Logically, however, it makes more sense to keep health care programs - regardless of their nature - together. Facilities and equipment can be shared. Personnel can be shared. Supplies can be shared - making for more effective use of resources, and thus for a more economic, efficient operation. At the very least, there should be full and open discussion with all affected parties before any separation of functions takes place.

- Kudos to Mayor Donald Flores for coming up with an idea for generating revenue for the CNMI that is far more feasible and far less punitive than anything the legislature has been able to come up with of late. His suggestion: construct additional professional baseball training fields to draw more foreign teams and their entourages to the CNMI for their pre-season practice, as some Japanese and Korean teams already do. Revenue would come from use of the fields, and the moneys spent in the community by teams and their accompanying staff, friends, families. A far more reasonable investment than building a casino..... 2/3/12

Thanks to what can only be called a dirty trick, whether or not Saipan's landscape becomes a mess or keeps its renowned and widely-admired natural beauty is now up to the governor. Saipan's zoning law, up before the local delegation for a vote on revisions crafted by the Zoning Board, was eviscerated by an amendment submitted by Stanley Torres that would turn most of the island into either village or mixed commercial zones. The amendment was introduced from the floor - apparently without prior notice to either fellow law-makers or the Board, and without opportunity for comment by Zoning Board members.

The amendment would make an area of 350 feet on either side of almost all paved roads on Saipan (with the exception of DanDan Road, Route 304) mixed commercial, allowing night clubs, auto repair and pawn shops, warehouses and factories - in fact, everything but certain heavy industrial uses, adult businesses and poker machines - along what amounts to a 700-foot corridor on all major roads on Saipan.

As if that weren't bad enough, the amendment also changes the zoning of most of Navy Hill, and parts of Capitol Hill, the Ste Lourdes area, China Town and Oleia, among others, into mixed commercial as well. The amendment also calls for almost all of Tanapag to become mixed commercial, instead of rural.

Torres' floor amendment was passed by the Saipan and Northern Island delegation, with only four members voting no: Delegation Chairman Ray Tebuteb, and members Felicidad Ogumoro, Ray Basa and Edmund Villagomez. The bill now goes to the governor for action.

The governor could veto the bill in its entirety - which would be a shame, because it also contained numerous changes that the Zoning Board had been arduously working on for months to bring the law into closer alliance with community interests. Or, possibly, he could just veto that part of the bill that encompasses Torres' amendments. He has forty days, according to the Constitution, to act on the bill - enough time for all those who support orderly development, who

believe Saipan's value lies in its beauty and attractiveness, who do not want to see every road become commercialized as Middle Road is, to let the governor - and his circle of advisors - know of their concerns. However, the ultimate - and fateful - decision is in the hands of the governor.

\*\*\*

Whoever decided that CHC's Family Care Clinic should be moved to its present location in the new wing wouldn't seem to know very much about accommodating traffic flow patterns or the clinic's users/patients. The Clinic's main entrance is on an incline that faces Navy Hill Road. One wonders why an entrance was placed there to begin with, since there is no reasonably nearby parking whatsoever. There are parking spaces at the foot of the incline, but those are meant for the administrative entrance to the building, facing Middle Road. There are parking spaces around the corner. But in both cases, they are considerably further away from the entrance to the present family care clinic than they were to where it was formerly located.

Most patients may be ambulatory, but they are suffering from something or other or they wouldn't be coming to the clinic. Yet they are expected to either walk a fair distance up an incline, or walk a fair distance from around the corner, or a fair distance from within the building, to get to the Clinic. For someone not feeling well, it's tortuous.

It is especially difficult for patients with a disability. In fact, it's nearly impossible. Even if one parks in the handicapped spot on the other side, in the "upper" parking area, and enters the building through the hemodialysis entrance (a shorter, easier walk from car to entrance), it's a long walk from there to the Family Care Clinic, which is on the other side of the building.

In fact, the whole driveway pattern for the new wing would seem awkward, poorly designed. The road is very narrow, and the curves are very sharp. How the road, or the entrance, or the re-location of the family clinic, could have ever been approved by anyone - hospital officials, funding agents or engineers - is unfathomable.

However, since it's fairly obvious that there isn't the funding to re-do the whole thing, other than moving the family clinic elsewhere, the only solution that comes to mind is to provide complimentary valet service to clients/patients of the Family Care Clinic - at the very least to the those who are disabled - who arrive unaccompanied. Let the client/patient drive up to the entrance to the Clinic, and have CHC provide someone to drive the car away and park it - and to retrieve it when the client/patient is ready to leave. Unheard of? Maybe. But a solution? Yes! - and a far less costly one than re-doing the whole road, adding more convenient parking spaces, moving the clinic.....

\*\*\*

Earlier this week the *Saipan Tribune* ran a longish press release issued by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community announcing the availability of information sheets from SPC that are designed to help fishermen manage and sustain the marine life on which their livelihood depends.

What it didn't spell out is that separate sheets are available for coconut crabs, spiny lobsters, trochus, octopuses, sea cucumbers, surgeonfish, reef snappers, parrotfish, rabbit fish, and groupers, among others. Each sheet provides information on the species and its distribution, on its habitats and feeding patterns, on its reproduction and life cycle, on fishing methods, and on management measures and options. The colorful and informative sheets can be downloaded

separately, or all together as a single file, at <  
<http://www.spc.int/coastfish/en/component/content/article/393-guide-and-information-sheets-for-fishing-communities.html>>.

\*\*\*

Short takes: - The *Marianas Variety* reported earlier this week that the chairman of the Senate Committee on Utilities, Communications and Transportation was not happy about the looming CUC rate increases, and had vowed to look into it. One wonders where he was during the many meetings of the Commonwealth Public Utilities Corporation at which the rate increases were discussed, during the public hearing that was just held on the same subject. Now that increases have been decided upon, he is going to "look into it"? Isn't that a little late?

- One element missing from the talk going around that maybe the CNMI ought to allow the hotels, golf courses, to buy the land their facilities sit on, is any discussion of (a) why those companies would want to do so, and (b) what the expected purchase prices would be. Over many years, the hotels and golf courses have already paid, or are paying, fees to lease those properties. How much more does the CNMI think they'd be willing to pay? And why? Has anyone talked to them?

- Who's more appropriately dressed - U.S. Assistant Secretary for Insular Affairs Tony Babauta, or CNMI's governor Fitial, Commerce Secretary Sixto Igisomar? In a photo on the front page of Wednesday's *Tribune*, all three are wearing long-sleeved shirts, (an indication that the air conditioning is set too cold), but unlike the other two, Babauta is not wearing a tie. My vote goes to Babauta, for recognizing that island wear doesn't call for neckties.

- Since former CHC Secretary Joseph K. Villagomez - for whatever reason - chose not to exercise the option to separate out some functions of the Health Center from the Corporation, what is the point of doing so now? Apparently, the administration wants to separate out "public health care" programs. Logically, however, it makes more sense to keep health care programs - regardless of their nature - together. Facilities and equipment can be shared. Personnel can be shared. Supplies can be shared - making for more effective use of resources, and thus for a more economic, efficient operation. At the very least, there should be full and open discussion with all affected parties before any separation of functions takes place.

- Kudos to Mayor Donald Flores for coming up with an idea for generating revenue for the CNMI that is far more feasible and far less punitive than anything the legislature has been able to come up with of late. His suggestion: construct additional professional baseball training fields to draw more foreign teams and their entourages to the CNMI for their pre-season practice, as some Japanese and Korean teams already do. Revenue would come from use of the fields, and the moneys spent in the community by teams and their accompanying staff, friends, families. A far more reasonable investment than building a casino.....