



MAYOR'S NEWSLETTER MAY 2009

Tough Decisions II

It seems that at least a few people in Jersey Village read my monthly letter as it was the most cited source of information at last month's council meeting. In my April letter I invited concerned citizens to attend the council meeting and over 120 people showed up. At some meetings we barely have enough people to warm up the room, but last month we had to bring in more chairs to accommodate everyone there. It was a great meeting with many people voicing their opinion on several of the issues before City Council.

I want to respond to some statements that were made that evening in reference to the proposed RV ordinance. First, a couple of the residents indicated that they did not know where the idea of restricting RV parking originated, insinuating that Council had generated the idea. Believe me -- rarely does the Mayor, City Council or City Manager think of such potentially divisive actions on their own. In most cases, and certainly with the RV issue, these result from Council responding to citizen input. Complaints from residents to City Council over an extended period of time indicated that it was time to have the Planning and Zoning Committee look into the situation with RV storage. After much study, the committee recommended the ordinance currently being considered. While the number of speakers at the April meeting were against passing the ordinance (15 against versus 5 in favor), the majority of people who have spoken before Council in the last 24 months have been in favor of such an ordinance.

In March, the Council had the idea that it would be best to put this to the voters in the form of a referendum to verify where the majority of the citizens stand on this issue. At the April meeting, however, the City Attorney indicated that a referendum on a zoning issue is not allowed by state law. The decision, therefore, is up to the City Council and 40% of the council will be elected May 9, 2009. I suggest that you find out where the candidates stand on this issue and vote accordingly.

Second, some speakers at the council meeting stated that RVs do not detract from property values in a neighborhood. My response to that comment is that I am not aware of any high-end neighborhoods in the county that allow RVs. All of the newer, deed-restricted neighborhoods, some even within Jersey Village city limits, prohibit RVs. Clearly, people who want to live in upper end neighborhoods do not want their neighbors parking RVs in their side or back yards. When Jersey Village was incorporated 53 years ago it was a rural community, a long drive from the city, and keeping things like RVs, tractors and farm animals was allowed and accepted by the few people who lived here. Things have changed over the last half century and we are no longer a rural community. The real question is whether Jersey Village wants to hold onto its rural roots or look more like the newer subdivisions surrounding us. That decision will certainly affect our property values.

Lastly, I have received letters and calls from several people who feel that approval of this ordinance would take away their dream of traveling the country in an RV. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Jersey Village residents will still be able to own RVs and they will still be able to keep them in their backyards; they will be required to keep them hidden from public view. A friend of mine who has been a resident for over 20 years called me to express his opinion of the ordinance. His neighbor, with whom he is the best of friends, recently purchased a very expensive RV. He parks it in his driveway in front of the garage behind a fence; the top of the RV is visible from the street. My friend said that he used to enjoy spending evenings on his back patio enjoying the trees and nature in his backyard, but all he sees now is the side of the 35 foot long RV parked just feet from his patio. My friend says that he does not even go outside anymore because the RV dominates the scenery. He likes his neighbor a lot so my friend has not said anything, but he feels trapped by the situation. It is obvious that my friend's neighbor did not consider his neighbors when he chose to store his RV in the driveway. Again, I think it is great for people to own RVs and boats and pursue their dream of traveling the country, but we cannot forget how that affects their neighbors. Personally, I choose to store my boat off my property in order to keep my property looking good and my neighbors happy.

As I stated last month, this is not an easy decision for City Council. There are a lot of emotional arguments on both sides of the issue. In the grand tradition of politics, I suggest a compromise to grandfather existing RVs and boats for a *limited period of time*. If a resident currently has a vehicle affected by the ordinance, they will have one month to register the vehicle, allowing them to keep that particular vehicle on their property for a length of time (time to be determined by Council), but not allow any additional vehicles in the future. If there are 75 such vehicles now, there will never be any more and that number will become fewer with time as people sell off those vehicles, move away or build a fence or garage to keep them from public view.

This issue will be on the May agenda and, as always, I welcome and appreciate public comment.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sam H. Huley". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.