

On My Mind

7/9/06

One of several 'questions of the week' would appear to be: what will the governor do to overcome the growing opposition to the installation of a monorail at the Grotto? The coconut wireless has it that the governor is insistent that the monorail be built. Opponents are counting on a filing of a permit application with the Coastal Resources Management Office, which could then justify requesting a hearing and a FOIA.

But what if, for example, an executive order were issued that developments on public land no longer require CRM permit applications? Moreover, the ineffectiveness, under this administration, of holding public hearings has already been demonstrated in the case of the Retirement Fund, which held hearings on bills pending before the legislature - bills most attendees on Saipan, Rota and Tinian opposed - only to have the bills become law anyway, and without the holding of legislative hearings.

The Retirement Fund is now attempting to catch up with events and file a law suit, but it will take some time to arrange funding for attorneys, bring them up to speed, get the Board to approve the filings, etc., etc. The "defenders" of the Grotto could face the same problem - trying to find funding, hire a lawyer and bring him or her up to speed after the building of the monorail at the Grotto has already been approved. The saying goes, "Better late than never," and while that is true, so is the saying that "a stitch in time saves nine."

Another major question of the week: when, and by how much, will power rates go up? Wouldn't it be nice to know what the issues are? What is involved in deciding when to do so? What data will determine by how much the rates go up? And who will be making the decisions? Or will it all be done by guesswork? One might also speculate whether the rates will go up at all - after all, this administration has predicted other dire events which have not occurred....

More questions: What happened to the promise that the surcharge would be repealed? Could they really have intended all along to repeal the surcharge, but to replace it with a higher rate? What kind of hanky-panky is that?

Which brings up still another question - not so much of the week, as of the month: Who got fired? How many were there? For how long? Are more firings being considered? Who's making the decisions? What factors are involved? What are the timeline constraints? Or is this all a myth too?

Yet another question - over an even longer term: when will the CNMI see the first of the severally promised new business ventures actually start up? Seems like another potential investor is identified almost every week, yet six months after first mention thereof, not a one has materialized. What is happening? Which one is serious? What outcomes have the many trips overseas produced? Are there any criteria, or priority, by which these investors are solicited? If so, what are they? Who defined them?

I can't remember whether transparency and openness were necessarily promised by this administration, but it sure isn't providing any.

The Zoning Board met last night. Members of the "Enhanced Destination" committee, formed under the governor's five-year strategic plan to increase tourism arrivals on island, presented their vision of how the Paseo could be enhanced - much emphasis being placed on creating shade by planting more trees, and cooling the area through the use of fountains - that is, on the need to correct major shortcomings that strangely enough, were not recognized by the initial designers.

Having finished their presentation, which included a bridge, a stage, overhead lights, and various other elaborate additions, the group turned to the Zoning Board members and said that of course, none of it would be worthwhile if the area were not cleared of places of adult entertainment, which they expected the Zoning Board to accomplish.

A Zoning Board member responded that while zoning could prohibit particular activities or types of establishments, prospectively - that is, in areas not yet developed - doing so retrospectively, in already developed areas, would be much more difficult. That could be considered a "taking," which would then require compensation of some sort.

It was acknowledged that the adult entertainment industry was obviously profitable, or there wouldn't be so much of it. There then arose a discussion of the need to provide a place to which such establishments could move, if they were to be re-located from the Paseo area - one suggestion was the La Fiesta Mall in San Roque. Maybe concessions could be offered to encourage them to move, it was suggested.

Finally, Zoning Board members discussed a proposal to establish separate requirements for licensing adult entertainment establishments as a method of control and regulation.

The Zoning Board usually meets on the first Thursday of every month; Chairman is Henry Hofschneider; executive director is Steve Tilley, who can be reached at 234-9663.

The "creature" is back! I did not get out of my car to check, so don't know if it was re-painted over the defacement, or whether the rust-colored overcoat was washed off, but it's back. How nice!

For those who missed out, the "creature" sits along the bank of the road leading up to Capitol Hill (at the last curve) - an artful imaginative painting of a face of sorts on part of a tree trunk - and was created by a grandfather for his daughter. Then vandals came along and smeared what looked like mud all over it, erasing all its features. But it has been re-painted. Bravo!

Let's hope the vandals have been permanently shamed into leaving it alone!

Another piece of good news - the Attorney General's Office has finally shown some interest in the findings of the Office of the Public Auditor and in pursuing the recommendations OPA has regularly issued. For far too long, much of the work of the Public Auditor has been ignored - findings that monies were misspent, improperly disbursed, inaccurately reported, left to gather dust in a corner. But with the administration frantically searching for money, it has finally dawned on the AG's Office that by acting on OPA findings, it might be possible to add additional resources to the coffer. Let us hope the pursuit of miscreants is done fairly and

even-handedly.

Short Takes:

A Department of Interior intern was quoted in yesterday's *Tribune* as saying that the CNMI seemed to be operating under an "'80's paradigm," in comments he made at this past week's Chamber of Commerce meeting. The dictionary defines a paradigm as a model. But what kind of a model the intern was talking about was not made clear - which could have been the fault of either the intern or the reporter. One might also ask what credentials the intern had for making such a statement. He is one of two on island to gather data for a report that will be submitted to the Department of Interior's Office of Insular Affairs after their month-long visit.

Asked for clarification, OIA Field Representative Jeff Schorr told me that the intern had, naively, it would seem, not expected to be quoted, and that, moreover, the intern was not here to offer comments, should not be considered an expert, and was not speaking for DoI. Nor will their report be made public. It is meant to be an internal document, explained Schorr. Hmphhhh!

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Two more incomplete news stories from this past week: the statement in an article about CUC's engines: "Once the repair work is done the engines must be decommissioned for at least a year." How's that again? And in an article about the newly established boarding school: "Its dormitory consists of nine units with two room each, that can accommodate 100 students." Not according to my math....

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That newspapers protect their advertisers is, I guess, assumed, but it was made explicitly clear to me this past week when, in a letter to the editor I had sent both local papers, one paper chose to eliminate all reference to the "target" of my letter, apparently because it had bought advertising in that paper. As a result, the first part of my letter, appearing to be a protest against smoking, did not make much sense, since it was without context. So does the CNMI have freedom of the press? Not really!

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The Saipan Local Delegation has appropriated, and the governor approved expenditure of, about 3/4 of a million dollars (\$750,000) just this past week. By far the largest portion - some \$500,000, went to the Marianas Visitors Bureau to pay for a tv soap opera series produced by a Korean company. Six of a total of twenty episodes were to feature the CNMI. In these times of fiscal restraint, can paying so much for such a fleeting presence really be justified?

Five monthly payments were to be made, the last after the show completes airing of the 20 episodes in September. Why, then, is the full amount being paid now? And an interesting side note: one of the local newspaper said \$30,000 of the remainder went to the JoeTen Kiyu Library, the other said it went to the Mayor's office for operations and to clean up oil spills at Lower Base.

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On a brighter note: Congratulations to Family Court Judge Ken Govendo on instigating the new child protection program! Govendo has long since ordered parents to take anger management courses or enter alcohol-abuse programs in his effort to improve family/social life of island residents. The new program is aimed specifically at ensuring that children's lives are taken into account as well.

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On the air this week: Teny Topalian interviews Sean Lynch, Assistant Attorney General, on laws, regulations and policies governing the "high seas" - that is, beyond the 200 mile limit - and their effect on protection of the marine environment. At 9:00 a.m. on KZMI, 103.9 FM, on Saturday, on KCNM, 101.1 FM, on Sunday.

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Movies this week: Depending on which paper you read, 5 PG's 2 PG-13's, or 4 PG's, 3 PG13's. In contention: "Cars," and "Pirates of the Caribbean" (or, "...of the Carribean") 2.

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Please take note: the next column will appear on August 18, upon my return from my annual trek to the mainland to visit family.

On My Mind can also be found on the web at <www.chamorro.com> or at <www.cnmi.net> (just click on "News & Weather"). If you missed a column due to an overfull mailbox or whatever, you can find it in the on-line "Archives" section.

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