

Hagerty, Karen H MVR

From: gailz [gailz@spamcop.net]
 Sent: Wednesday, January 01, 2003 11:29 AM
 To: Hagerty, Karen H
 Subject: MYCA proposal

Dear **Ms.** Hagerty,

The following is a letter I wrote to the Iowa City **Press-Citizen** in response to previous letters to the editor; as you can see, it grew to be an opinion piece, **published** by the P-C on 31 December, Since we're off to Miami to cheer on the Hawks, I don't have time to rewrite it, but am sending it to you and the others on your **website**, in hopes that it will add **constructively** to the discussion.

Thanks!

To the Editor:

Rita **Sotelo** and David and Judy Thayer are quite right: the idea of the Muslim Youth Camp is "interesting" and "nice." It is most unfortunate that these readers of the **Press-Citizen** have no other sources of information about this project, apparently, than this newspaper. The editorial of December 27 was especially inaccurate and misleading. Although the full report on the environmental impact study of the site (prepared by an independent engineering firm) makes an evening of careful reading, one might expect the **P-C'** seditorial board to invest that time before offering its opinion.

First, the editorial questions the recent stridency of opposition to the plan, suggesting (as did Ms. **Sotelo** and the Thayers) that **anti-Muslim** sentiment is fueling it. There is undoubtedly some truth to this, especially since 9-11. But the report makes clear that well before 9-11 – on July 12, 2000, when two public sessions were held in North Liberty to invite public opinion about the project – the majority of the concerns expressed in written comments (more than 285, approximately, of about 300) were environmental: street capacity and cost of improvements, feasibility of wastewater treatment, habitat degradation, etc. Eleven comments were characterized as concern that the area should be "for native Iowans."

Of course, a true cynic could assume that any or all of these comments disguised **anti-Islamic** prejudice, but I can assure the Thayers that at least one person who was there that day would object just as strongly to a Boy Scout or Christian **leasehold** of this same nature! (The Boy Scouts, as we all know, have taken a national stand against homosexuality in their leadership.)

2-5 [My objection is to any exclusionary group whose occupation of this site would be as complete during the summer season as this proposal suggests, i.e., 10 weeks of camping sessions during the summer months. The facility **would** be available to the **public** during the rest of the year for conferences, weddings, etc. It is not **clear** whether the **public** would have access to the proposed beach facilities during the summer, nor do I have any information about the fees for **public usage**.]

29-1 [In sum, the recent and "most strident" objections simply reflect the fact that the environmental assessment has just been released, with a brief period for **public** comment that corresponds with the holiday season and its preoccupations. Many of those concerned find this timing **problematic**.]

13-23 [As to the assessment **itself** and its conclusion that there **would** be no significant environmental impact, it ought to be noted that "the MYCA Lease . . . does not meet current state standards **for** location of wastewater treatment facilities. Development of this alternative would be contingent on a change in state standards . . . or a variance in the buffer zone requirement" (my italics). In other words, there is no place on this site **for** safe location of the requisite sanitary system. Are the state standards so arbitrary that a variance **would** readily be granted? I find it interesting that, if the variance for this site isn't granted, none of the **available** sites designated for this type of high-density development within the **federally** owned lake area meet the criteria for the **MYCA camp**. I thus have to question the **intelligence** behind the master plan of the Army Corps of Engineers.]

30-2 [There are a number of other **environmental** concerns that are also dismissed by the report, although perhaps less casually than the P-C's comment that equates the construction of "a

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simple gravel road" with the building of this large facility. **A** do have one **Muslim-specific** environmental question: will the **daily prayer calls**, (in many communities made by loudspeaker, have any impact on the environment? I would have the same question about any facility that proposed to communicate with **its** campers by **loudspeaker**.)

As to the Press-Citizen's math—it's nuts, **fortunately!** Never mind the **statistical** somersault regarding the likelihood of a terrorist among the campers, which is just silly. But a **17,500-square-foot** lodge is not "no larger than **2 1/4** football fields," thank **goodness!** (FYI, a football field is something over 50,000 square feet.)

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In sum, my personal objections to this project are to its exclusionary **nature** (to its obvious impact upon the broader **environment**), **and** to the impact upon the public **budget for the** services required to support such a **facility**.

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Diversity is indeed important in our community, and our much-vaunted **liberalism** does often conceal a good deal of prejudice: I have seen this in my own neighborhood. **It** would make more sense, it seems to me, to integrate the housing and instructional facilities for **this** group in a less-isolated area, **so** that true integration of the campers into our daily life might actually occur. (I would guess that family visits in our local towns for kids coming from other areas could easily be arranged, after the pattern of New York's Fresh Air Fund, if that seems appropriate.) **If the** lake site is developed, let it be available year-round to the wider community, but with **a** reservation system for certain facilities that would give preference to nonprofit groups (Iowa City's parks have a reservation program for its shelters, as does the public library for its conference **rooms**.)

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I hope the MYCA will make a point of meeting with the **local** community if their proposal is accepted by the corps. Better still, the neighbors of the site and concerned officials ought to invite **MYCA** officials to meet with them. In light of the many valid questions that remain unanswered by the environmental assessment, a serious dialogue between those groups **who** appear to have opposing interests seems to be an essential next step for this project.

Sincerely,

Gail P. Zlatnik
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