

Bringing People Together

I want to thank the editor of the Clarkston News for allowing me to share these thoughts with you about bringing people together in Clarkston. Especially in an election year, some things surface which seem to divide us. But I'm an optimist. I think things which divide are often misunderstandings which can be resolved when we remember our core value in Clarkston.

People love Clarkston! Houses here typically don't stay on the market very long. Many houses never go on the market because they are passed from generation to generation. These days houses are selling above list price. The city has even planned tax revenues to increase slightly (in our conservative balanced budget) because property values are moving upward.

This was not always the case. Joe Luginski, mayor of Clarkston during the downturn of 2008, asked me at that time to come back on city council by appointment after being away for several years. Joe saw people buying houses at low prices in Clarkston in those days but not understanding the subtleties of our culture.

Clarkston has been able to preserve our original village, intact, unlike so many others having sacrificed their subtle ambiance because they relinquished purposeful planning and zoning. Clarkston is an 1830s mill village, as were Rochester, Birmingham and Lake Orion. I challenge you to find their intact original village today.

Nancy and I have lived here as a married couple almost 50 years. Nancy went to high school in Clarkston. As we look back over our tenure, one central perception has kept us here, an underlying sense of "charm". Clarkston is charming. I know . . . charm seems ethereal and intangible, but it is nevertheless present, powerful and cohesive for our community.

But I've come to realize charm, without a supporting structure, will slowly dissipate and disappear. Keeping charm without structure is like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall. A body without a skeleton can't stand up. Charm is quantifiable and measurable. It has substance. The structure of charm comes from planning, zoning and careful enforcement. That's what we have here in Clarkston.

Charm doesn't just happen. It does not occur in a vacuum, but is the result of structure, and structure depends on keeping rules. Most of us don't like rules, but when we realize we can't survive without them, we must embrace them together.

As your mayor, I believe I am elected to lead. That's what I want to do in regard to preserving our "charm". I do not want to see charm lost for reasons of special interest or individual considerations, mine included. So as your mayor, I will strive to keep us unified by encouraging every citizen to appreciate the structure of our zoning and adhere to it in individual situations. Our city governmental is set up to honor this type of thoughtful process.

We have a City Council, a Planning Commission (PC), an Historic District Commission (HDC) and a Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). These bodies are not made up of self-seeking individuals or politicians. Though imperfect, they are our neighbors, those who believe Clarkston's charm is the glue that holds us together, protected by the specifications of our zoning with judicial consideration by the ZBA for individual hardships.

There will be more opportunities to write about individual situations, but make no mistake, unless we realize our core value, and support the structure which keeps it enduring, we will gradually and inevitably lose our fragile charm, never to be retrieved. I encourage every citizen to learn about and engage with the process which is friendly and designed to preserve our core value. If we protect our charm, we will protect property values for ourselves and future generations. Property values are the tangible measurement of charm. I encourage your feedback!

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