

CEO restructuring

"My child attends CEO, and the program is excellent. I hope the WJC School Board realizes this. Many children, like my child, attend CEO for academic reasons. My son received Ds and Fs while in middle school and now receives Bs, all because the CEO teachers have been giving the children love and concern. I would love for my son to continue receiving a good education."

"I don't always agree with W.C. Donovan's views, but with his 'Tough luck' editorial he has rightly taken the WJC School Board to task for its ineptness at dealing with crucial issues involving troubled youths in our community. That is why I feel compelled to respond. I don't have a vested interest in the Center for Educational Opportunities, other than I am a resident of James City and a retired police officer from another state. The troubled youths sent to that school program should in no way be considered 'throwaway kids' who 'had their chance and blew it.' I'm sure that many of those young people are able to be saved. It takes a concerted effort on the part of the School Board and James City supervisors to help save them through CEO, but if they don't, the alternative is unconscionable. I am not so naive as to believe that all of these troubled youths can be saved. But with the right people working with them, many could be helped to lead useful lives. The alternative is to cut bait and let the police and judicial system take responsibility for them. As a 28-year law enforcement veteran, I have dealt with troubled, misguided individuals and followed them to adulthood. Those who received and accepted help and guidance, with the cooperative efforts of the school system, police and probation, turned their lives around and became productive adults. Those who didn't, continued their downward spiral of criminal activity. Have the School Board members and supervisors explored the possible state and federal grant programs that might be available to help fund this program or in obtaining a structure for it? If the School Board and supes can't or won't work this out and be part of the solution rather than the problem, maybe we should vote them out of office and elect people who are more proactive."

More — Letter 19A, story inside.

"I consider myself a fair-minded person. For years I have read the Gazette and enjoyed W.C. O'Donovan's editorials. But his most recent editorial, 'Tough luck,' on March 14 was just short of character assassination. Our school personnel deserve better."

"Mike Ludwick has sent out, via mass e-mail, a WJC Schools document that needs to be addressed. If he had perused it, he might have paused, since the document reflects his time on the School Board. The CEO staff are practically answerable to only themselves, evaluation of the students going back to a home school is determined by the teachers and CEO staff, who would not have a job if they were effective in sending them back to their home school. Shouldn't there be a panel that can objectively evaluate given criteria, of which there doesn't seem to be any? 100% of the teachers responded that they rarely or never conference with the students' home schools. Middle school personnel who received these children back answered their surveys with a resounding somewhat satisfied, not satisfied or very satisfied for almost every question. 50% of the teachers had less than one year of experience in an alternative setting, which the document earlier reports as an important area to have experience. Almost 50% of the staff reported no feeling of community in this setting, but only 69% bothered to return the survey. This program seems to be screaming for a redo."

"It's time to talk about the real issues as they relate to budgets both for WJC and James City. The various budgets for York Schools, Hampton, Isle of Wright, etc., are laid out in the Daily Press. Unfortunately, the James City budgets are never laid out as to revenue. It's assumed that the county is a good steward of our taxes. How does one even make an educated assessment? A few years back, W.C. O'Donovan led the charge for shared services, which would lead to greater efficiencies. What happened? Every activity that the county took over required absorbing the school employees, additional employees were hired to do the same work, then the schools were billed for the services. The county agreed that it would assume the role of the construction supervisor since it had all the folks who ensured code and building compliance. WJC is a reactionary force. The James City supervisors seldom turn down a new development, increasing the demand on services. Each new development guesses how many new children will be housed, and that is always under the mark. The school system is left to pick up the pieces. The supervisors say that they can't demand proffers from the new developments, that it's against state law. One only has to read The Washington Post to realize there is a law, but it's not being followed. In James City, developers proffer land that is unbuildable and the county accepts the developers' terms. While I understand the value of CEO, these are bad kids, not throwaways, but we certainly shouldn't deprive the 10,000 students who do the right thing every day of programming and lavish it on CEO. It's time that the parents of these children become involved in their lives."

"So much emphasis is put on the teachers and school system to ensure the success of children academically. When are parents going to take some responsibility? The general public is naive about some of the situations schoolchildren are dealing with at home, all of which are out of the control of the schools. Lack of food, good parenting skills, routine, a bed in which to sleep, and safe home environment all affect a child's

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success as a student too. School systems and educators could do everything within their power to improve test scores. However, until the home lives of the children who don't succeed are improved there will always be an achievement gap."

"In light of the controversy about the alternative-ed program in WJC, it would be interesting to know what kind of alt-ed program neighboring York Schools has."

York Schools has York River Academy for alternative learning styles. Students must apply, and the program is not open to students with disciplinary issues. For long-term suspended and expelled students, York and WJC send a handful of students each to Enterprise Academy. York also offers its virtual high school and home-based instruction as options.

"I may be mistaken, but I seem to recall a consultant's report on CEO saying it was a good program with a promising future. The report was given at a WJC School Board meeting 12-24 months ago. I saw it on the school's cable channel. Does the Gazette have a copy of that report?"

More — Story inside.

"Although I believe in the Center for Educational Opportunities and that the students need a place to be helped for their education, I cannot believe administrators are thinking of putting them in the Historic Triangle Community Services Building, where Head Start children attend. Youths who have been expelled from school, many of them for violence, near pre-school and Head Start children? Not good."

bloom

"Now that Food Lion will be upscaling some of its supermarkets, where will middle-class and lower-income people shop? Is anyone looking out for the working class?"

"Thank you to Food Lion. I read with interest the March 17 article in which it was stated that Food Lion is planning to remodel both of its stores in the city. The store at Williamsburg Shopping Center is the closest supermarket to our home. We are looking forward to having a nicer place to do our grocery shopping."

Eminent domain

"Please tell me I'm wrong about this: We're going to take homes from the senior citizens who live along Ironbound Road to build affordable houses for senior citizens? I smell a rat."

More — Editorial, 19A.

"I don't understand what the problem is with the setback from the road. Ironbound Square is near New Town, which obviously got a waiver from the 50-foot setback for public streets. Add Ironbound Square to the New Town mixed-use district, but with its own set of design guidelines and such, and it has its waiver instantly."

"I see that James City seems to repeat itself. It wants to take by eminent domain property from people living along Ironbound Road. Those less-than-affluent people are being overlooked because of this. Their homes are worth as much to them as a home costing \$500,000. The county doesn't seem to want to use eminent domain when it comes to Lake Powell because those homeowners, the ones who own the lake, are more affluent. If you don't have money, the county doesn't need you."

"I am white, past retirement age and a lifelong resident of Tidewater. With the start of New Town, many of us in the community, black and white, saw it coming. The eminent domain proceedings along Ironbound Road have only one purpose, just like the new housing around the corner on Strawberry Plains Road and up across Ironbound to the VDOT garage. The whole issue is simply to get those poor black folks out of this area. There is no doubt that when the low-cost housing is completed, not one of the original residents will be financially able to return. This area mostly only offers low-skill, low-paying jobs. Nowhere does Williamsburg or James City allow housing that those kinds of employees can afford."

"James City wants Ironbound Road and Richmond

Road to look like Mercury Boulevard and Jefferson Avenue. To do that, the county feels that it needs to use eminent domain to run all the blacks off Ironbound."

School issues

"Gary Mathews, WJC Schools superintendent, needs an economics lesson. According to the state Department of Education website, elementary children as young as kindergartners learn the difference between needs and wants. Needs are items that you must have to run the schools. They are the items that all schools have to have to exist, such as principals, teachers, nurses, janitors, cafeteria workers, copy machines, paper, desks, chairs, etc. Wants are wish-list items, such as super-expensive technology equipment. Since the majority of the current seven elementary schools are running along and existing nicely without the new wants in technology, not to mention the huge maintenance costs, I would suggest cutting all items from the budget that are wants. Add the wish-list items at another time when new schools are not opening and can be added without sacrificing those things that are necessary."

"My son, who attends Jamestown High, participated in the school-wide tornado drill recently. He came home from school telling me that if we actually had a tornado in Williamsburg, a lot of kids at Jamestown would be injured or killed. He explained that the kids were told to go in the main hall near the cafeteria, where the hall is filled with glass. The cafeteria wall is glass, the guidance office has a large window, the entrances are glass and there is glass in the upstairs hall loft, overlooking the hall where the kids were instructed to go. It is a well-known fact that glass breaks and flies around during a tornado, slicing through everything in its path. Students need to be in interior rooms without windows or at least hallways where there aren't large panes of glass. Having grown up in the Midwest, I have experienced many tornado touchdowns. Our schools need to realize the potential devastation and loss of life that will occur during a tornado if our students do not have adequate protection. I'd like to know what steps the administration at Jamestown, as well as other WJC schools, intends to take to keep our kids safe during a tornado. The plan now in place is obviously inadequate."

"As the parent of a rising sixth-grader this fall, I would like to hear from other parents who work an 8-5 job who aren't quite ready to have their child go home to an empty house after school. My daughter's school does not offer after-school care, nor can students participate in sports until seventh grade. I know she can legally be alone at home for a specified period of time, but I'm not sure if she's ready, or if I am, for that matter. And on early-release days, the kids are out at noon. Any suggestions?"

"We have a serious problem concerning the exiting of Lafayette High traffic after school, and it has been an issue for some years. For all of us who have legitimate concerns around town about anything, the Last Word is our last resort. Trying to exit Lafayette after 2:40 p.m. on any given weekday is a nightmare, and in particular after 3 p.m. Security directs ins and outs, to help with a better flow of school traffic, but stop directing traffic once the last school bus has left, at 3 o'clock. That leaves parents, student drivers and employees stuck with exiting onto heavily trafficked Longhill Road. Traffic surveys have declared that a traffic light is not needed because its best use will only be for early mornings and afternoons. However, for some time we have offered a simple plan to the school and powers-that-be: The superintendent should direct security to stay on the job directing traffic on Longhill until 3:15-3:20 p.m. each day. The difficult part is trying to persuade the superintendent to walk a mile in our shoes."

Jamestown 2007

"The secrecy surrounding the date of the visit by Queen Elizabeth II is predictable. I'm sure the authorities know when she will be here, and those affiliated with the authorities have their tickets for the right day. I guess the lower class who can't afford to buy tickets for multiple days are out of luck. How many working-class people have seen any head of state except on television? Just like the old days."

"Tour guides at Jamestown are being prevented from explaining the importance of Christian history in the founding of America. They are reportedly under orders to refer to items such as the Ten Commandments and Lord's Prayer only as religious in nature. California pastor Todd DuBord was stunned on a recent tour of Bruton Parish Church when the guide responded to his inquiry about Christian plaques inside this Anglican church by saying, 'I'm only allowed to say they are religious in nature.' This is but another example of the animosity that secularists have against Christianity."

"After reading the front-page story on Jamestown 2007 and Christianity, I checked the World Net Daily website. Nowhere did I see any specific advertising for Coulter, Hannity or O'Reilly. There was, however, an advertisement for a T-shirt with the words 'Re-defeat Communism in 2008.' It showed a picture of Hillary Clinton with a circle around her and a red slash through the circle. The Gazette reporter should have focused on complaints about Jamestown's 2007 tour guide script and the actions of individual guides in using that script. Instead, a sizable portion of the article ventured into the opinion category and lamented on a right-wing conspiracy or condemned those who complained about the denigration of America's Christian heritage."

"Regarding the Settlement guide's description of the Jamestown Church plaques as religious rather than Christian: Does the religious wrong hold that God gave the Ten Commandments to that good Christian, Moses? This sure will surprise our Jewish son-in-law."

Cheers & jeers

"If anyone is looking for great lawn care service, I recommend James River Lawn Care. The workers are timely, affordable, environmentally conscious, and most of all, care about what they are doing. It is nice to deal with a small operation that is still customer service-oriented. James River Lawn Care can be reached at 746-6465."

"Jeers to the person who would not take the time to put the Wal-Mart shopping cart into a corral when he or she was finished shopping, instead, leaving it in Lowe's parking lot. During the windstorm Thursday evening, the cart flew across the parking lot and caused \$350 worth of damage to the side of my car. Please be considerate of others, and return the shopping carts to the corrals, which are provided for that purpose."

"I recommend Stephanie at Salon Vivace to anyone in search of great color/cut. I've been going to her for several years for cut/color, and she is a thorough professional, taking the time and doing the job the customer likes. Salon Vivace is not a guy's barbershop. Also, for an incredible pedicure, I suggest making an appointment with China at Nails Uptown in Williamsburg Crossing."

"Congratulations to senior John Held for finishing third in the Virginia High School League AA state wrestling tournament for Lafayette. Also, congrats to sophomore Shawn Sweeney for finishing fourth and to both grapplers for achieving all-state honors. Chad O'Donnell should also be commended for placing."

"We participated in the Gazette-sponsored Spring Flea Market at the Williamsburg Indoor Sports Complex last Saturday. Those who organized the event are to be commended for a fine job."

Home construction

"It was terrible to read that problems with home construction was the final straw for a James City woman (March 17 Gazette). Many of us buying homes in this area have endured dreadful experiences with developers, poor quality construction and lamentable, if not absent, government building inspectors. Developers should be able to earn a profit from their buildings. But, how do they live with themselves when they knowingly erect shoddy structures? How do county and city staff inspectors live with themselves knowing they have not paid enough attention to the construction process and result? We have watched and endured a faulty porch roof that had to be replaced. Neighbors had ceilings fall from moisture trapped, major leaks and mold from lack of code required flashing. Others had constantly wet crawl spaces. We know of homes in other neighborhoods that endure major cracking, flooding and badly cracked or broken sidewalks. I hope both county and city code compliance departments, City Council and James City supervisors take this very real and unnecessary situation to heart. Stop allowing incompetent or dishonest developers to create expensive junk, and stop sending untrained or incompetent inspectors to do the job. And, apologize to the buyers of the buildings approved for habitation when they should have been corrected by the builder."

High-density housing

"The city Planning Commission expressed at its March 14 meeting that the difference between 14 and 22 units per acre is minor, but still several spoke strongly in favor. If the difference is so minor, and the concerns of so many residents so great, why wouldn't the commission opt for working with the residents instead of against us? We are the stakeholders. The developers are not. We stay, the developers leave. The planning commissioners are appointed to represent the people, not the developers."

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