

First FridayTM Opinions And Editorials

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PEOPLE WHO WORK HARD - THE LIFE OF OUR CITY

I didn't vote for this! Oh, yes you did.

Redwood Avenue area taxpayers discover costly truth about developers' plans for their property

First Friday: You both voted against the levy in the county's last election. Tell us why.

Chris Murphy: OK, see with me, I thought because I was in the city that I was paying city taxes and people in the county were paying county taxes. Yes, I understand the city is in the county, but I'm already paying through the nose for city taxes. My taxes *doubled* when I got annexed in.

Dale Deger: Now, the Darnell Road issue has, uh, hammered me. I tried to sell my property but there was this black cloud of all the real estate people not *wanting* to show the house because they knew that this [Darnell Road improvement] project was pending and that, ha, it's kind of a joke: our property taxes have went up, but our property values have gone down.

Deger: The city claims they want to do this Darnell Road project for "safety reasons." I've lived there six years and I've been in town a long time, my wife's born and raised. I can't recall really hearing of too many safety incidents on Darnell Road – ever

Chris Murphy:
I feel like I'm penalized by being a working class individual and living in this area.

Now, we sat in a meeting and listened to District 7 representatives saying "Oh no, we have no intention of selling or doing anything with that land across from you." Which was a lie, because now we've got the safety station going in there on the corner.

Now, I'm wondering if I'm starting to connect all these dots. So we've got a new safety station; oh gee, maybe they *are* gonna do something with that property across the street. They want new fancy sidewalks and planter boxes and everything else – why? Who's footing the bill for it? *We* are.

I think the developers and the city and everybody else that's going to reap the benefits of this new road oughta fork in the money. When we learned of this project, we went to the city meeting and we saw a breakout of the properties that were going to charged a fee.

Well there must be 30, 40 homes on Galaxy and other areas that aren't being charged. And it's because someone made an *error* in filing the paperwork at the title office!

Murphy: Darnell Road is off of Redwood Avenue, adjacent to Redwood Elementary School. From what I understand, the bankers and developers, they want to put a junior high in that field and a sub-station for the police. Honestly, I think that they want a fancy road and nice sidewalks and planter boxes because they want their developments in there. So let *them* put it in if they want it there.

Deger: Now doesn't that make you go, hmmm? If all of this was mathematically divided up amongst everyone as fairly as it should be, uh, we would all have a heck of a lot less of a financial burden.

Murphy: Two years ago, yeah, we got a letter in the mail saying "you voted; here's a list of all the people that agreed to put in a new road." It estimated almost 2 million dollars!

Murphy: Oh, you can make payments though, but you'll get charged 1% above going rate.

Deger: And here we go.

Friday: Now your amount is \$6400, how about you Chris?

Murphy: I think mine was about \$7600.

Friday: You've indicated, well, aside from the fairness of it, it might be something that you simply can't pay.

Murphy: They put liens on our homes. As a citizen and member of this community I *don't* have a problem paying my fair share, whether it be O&C money or school money or sheriff's money. The problem is, I don't feel like I'm paying my fair share. I feel like I'm penalized by being a working class individual and living in this area.

Redwood Avenue Development – Who Read the Fine Print?

First Friday: Did you really vote to spend eight thousand dollars on grand sidewalks and fancy planter boxes, Chris?

Chris Murphy: As I said, we got a letter in the mail saying “you voted and here’s a list of the people that agreed to put in a new road.” I looked on that list and here’s my name!

They told us “go all the way back through your paperwork from your title company and it’s written there.” Well, yeah, seventeen pages later, there’s two lines that says nothing about a 2 million dollar road. It just says something about this LID, Land Improvement District. Well, what does that mean to me?

My contractor, when he sold us the house he didn’t tell us that we’re gonna be sharing the bill of a 2 million dollar road between fifty-somethin’ people. So (laughs), y’know it’s not like I’m fixing a crack in my sidewalk for \$7.00 a week extra in my utilities or, y’know, my water goes up because they’re putting new water lines down the street.

This is a huge deal that we don’t have sitting in our bank account. The title company, they didn’t tell us. Our developer, he didn’t tell us either.

Murphy: At the title company, you sign in about 80 places. Anybody that’s ever bought property or a house knows that after a while you can’t even write your signature the same, let alone follow every line. To have a 26-page document with two small lines at the bottom of a paragraph is ridiculous. They pulled the wool over our eyes; they bullied us into it.

The other thing is, they needed fifty percent of the people on that street to agree, or be suckered into it. And here is the District 7 school, they have a least twenty-five percent of the whole street; maybe thirty. Their single vote totally took the rest of everybody else on the street with it, and cost us way out of proportion.

Dale Deger: Granted, you are supposed to read everything before you sign it, but you’re also depending on people you pay to provide services to you.

Murphy: They work for *us*.

Deger: The real estate agents are working for you, the title company is supposed to be working for you. And lo and behold, y’know, page 42, line 16, sub-paragraph A, line 2, something about Land Improvement District. I don’t, who the heck, y’know, what are we supposed to know about *that*?

What’s extremely interesting is that there are many homes that somehow, mysteriously, didn’t get hit with this bill. But we’re getting stiffed.

Friday: Wait, wait! They put a lien on your homes to pay more than your fair share of 2 million dollars for sidewalks and planter boxes, all because some developer didn’t file the right forms with the city?

Deger: Laurel Sampson at the city said that the forms were supposed to have been filed. The forms were not filed. Now whose responsibility that is, I don’t know.

She did admit there was an error. It’s not right. There’s a mathematical equation that determines how much you owe, but there’s people who are not in the mix and that causes the percentage of our payments to go way, way up. That’s not right

Wait, wait! They put a lien on your homes to pay more than your fair share of 2 million dollars for sidewalks and planter boxes, all because some developer didn’t file the right forms with the city?

Deger: I think what got them the votes was the city allowing those developers to subdivide property that should not have been subdivided. It’s all who’s scratching whose back and who’s greasing whose palm to get ahead. And, unfortunately, you and I and homeowners in the area are the ones left holding the bag for them.

My Cat Jack Says: We’re pushing property owners too far. As a cat, I’m not allowed to own property (it’s discrimination against Feline-Americans!), except for my favorite chew toy. But when yet another tax to be balanced on the back of property owners is put to a fair vote, they have made themselves heard – in no uncertain terms, buddy. So now the Old Boys Network has sunk to the level of tricking taxpayers into paying for “safety” once again. Sound familiar? Do it for the kids! Do it for the flowerboxes! Do it for everyone else’s family! Hey, do it for my own personal retirement fund, because I’m a developer and I need a California summer home.



PEOPLE WHO ARE PUSHED OUT - THE DEATH OF OUR CITY

What Happens When You Lose Heart?

Faced with losing everything to runaway development schemes, good people contemplate just moving out of the city

Dale Deger: Yes, I'm trying to move out into the county, out, way out, outside every growth boundary, because it's a mess.

Chris Murphy: I'm sick of it. I want out. I mean pretty soon. If we push all of the working people out of this town, we're gonna be chock-full of retirees and *non-working* people.

It's great that the banks and the restaurants get a ton of money from retirees. And non-working people get welfare and that's great. But who's going to make the pizzas and run the stores?

I'll tell ya, I feel sorry for the person that's trying to raise a family, with a husband and a wife working, kids in daycare, making \$10.00 an hour each.

Deger: Can't do it.

Murphy: Where's their dream of having a future? Definitely no retiring. They're not gonna be able to live in this county when they retire. They're gonna have to move somewhere else. How can you buy a house for 250 or 300,000 when you make \$30,000 a year combined?

Dale Deger:
The builders, the developers, they all know what's coming down the road because they're the ones making all the decisions.

Murphy: You can't do it. So where's the motivation? Why would I want to stay in this area and live out my days for low wages and no retirement, when I could move to a different area and be better off financially?

I can always come back here and retire because it's a great retirement area. I move in the county, I buy 5 acres with my out-of-state money and I pay very little taxes on it because I don't have kids in school. So what do I care?

But I do have enough retirement money to put in a really nice security system, so lack of sheriffs don't bother me either because my security is probably better than what the sheriff would do anyway.

Deger: And what about elderly people who are on fixed income, that are retired? You think they have 6, 7, or 8 thousand dollars for the city's planter boxes?

Murphy: But there is an out for them. If a guy has five acres on that road, he can *sell* all his property to one of the developers or a councilman and that way he could make enough money to pay for his sidewalk.

Deger: Yeah, you're right.

Murphy: Then they would have a prime hunk of land to put 25, 30 homes on. So he can give up his place where he raised his children and spent all of his days, that used to be farmlands, and now is urban.

Friday: Now it's "developed."

Deger: Yeah.

Murphy: I went to a city counsel meeting when this all was coming to a head. And, so there's this older gentleman; he's retired; he's lived on his property on Redwood Avenue his whole life. Yeah he has a decent hunk of land, probably

three to five acres. He's lived there forever; his family was raised on that property. He is speaking in front of this council, bleeding his heart out "But I don't *have* 50 thousand dollars. I don't have any *way* of getting 50 thousand dollars. This is the place I know and I love, how can you guys force me pay this?"

I'll never forget, while he was talking, one council member had his feet up on his desk in front of him, leaning back in his chair, just staring at the ceiling, while another councilman was chewing on his pen paying no attention to this poor man, who is one of our citizens one of our elders, bleeding his life out there in front of them.

At the end of this meeting, they said: "Well, I think we already have our decision made; can't we just vote it through?" and "I think we already know our decision." Of course you already know your decision. You are just appeasing people by letting them, uh, show up to these meetings, but your, his voice meant nothing to them.

Chris Murphy:
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Deger: Quite frankly, I think that's kinda the way it's been in this area for a long time. The builders, the developers, they all know what's coming down the road because they're the ones making all the decisions. They ask themselves, "OK, self, just how can I get this infrastructure, this new street that I want - and not pay for it?" I'm not trying to say it's a conspiracy or anything, but just ask yourself: who stands to benefit the most from all this?

OK, enough, give me some good news!

Local charity iTV (Interschool Television) has been nationally recognized again, this time by Washington, D.C. lawmakers.

“All over the country, our Grants Pass has been getting extremely positive attention,” smiles iTV’s student Vice President Brandon Traub.

Interschool Television is an Oregon non-profit based here in Grants Pass. Experienced adults assist students in a variety of media productions to help community projects.

“Because we get so many congratulations for our work in Josephine and Jackson counties, people from other states and even across the country want to meet us,” explains Traub.

This time, the invitation came from the United States Senate Republican High Tech Task Force.

iTV was invited to the nation’s capitol to talk about the work they do in Grants Pass with TV students and virtual reality.

“Now, we’re not political,” says Traub, “but I know Washington is always looking for energy,” he adds with a grin. “We have that and enthusiasm to spare.”

Interschool Television has brought some international fame to Josephine County by combining television, the Internet, and 3D virtual reality techniques with community service projects in which students can earn U.S. high school and college credit.

The U.S. Senate has noticed iTV.

“You’ve accomplished something totally unique and that’s why we wanted to meet with iTV,” said Fitzhugh Lee and Adam Barker of the office of Senator John McCain (R-AZ).

“We simply don’t meet with people from outside our state; we don’t have time. But we really wanted to meet you,” added Shane Barker of the office of Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV).

The Senate Republican High-Tech Task Force noted that iTV “bridges the gap between institutes of higher education, far distant and home-schooled students, and soldiers currently serving in the U.S. armed forces – in a spectacular way.”

The support crosses party lines.

“What you’ve accomplished seems totally unique, said Oriel FeldmanHall of the Committee on Small Business & Entrepreneurship, chaired by majority Senator John Kerry (D-MA).

“Our senator is on Appropriations, Armed Services, and Education. We’re impressed by this disabled veterans idea of yours,” said Mark Paolicelli of the office of Senator Jack Reed (D-RI).

Growing as it has from the southern part of the state, iTV was generally regarded by the Oregon delegations as a little high-tech miracle. Recurring offers to relocate were politely refused, and there remained a genuine concern on the part of some Oregon staffers about the level of infrastructure and community support to be expected from an area of the state perceived in Salem and Washington, D.C. as a region not vitally committed to the nurturing of new ideas.

“It’s true that Interschool Television has received much more attention from outside our area than from within, but it remains to be seen whether continued national acclaim will have an effect locally,” says iTV

“Our projects are mostly for the benefit of the Rogue Valley area. But most of our accomplishments are recognized by experts in other parts of the nation,” says iTV Vice President Brandon Traub. “They all say we are a centerpiece of invention.”

“It’s not true that this area’s all about monster truck rallies and runaway developers,” says iTV.

“I’m convinced that local folks find real pride in the innovations we are developing right here,” insists Traub. “And if they had any idea how to help a charity such as ours, they probably would.”

Interschool Television’s latest project at TheWar100.com is a TV series about WWII veterans.

My Cat Jack Says: Thank heaven for the happy, cleancut kids of Interschool Television. I don't know about you, but I can take only so much of this negative stuff. My eyes glaze over. Sure, even basics such as community TV are dominated by fraud and corruption and bad politics. But not little iTV. They just keep humming along, getting pats on the back for their good work, This charity is full of kids who work hard- and succeed.



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