



USUALLY RIGHT
BY JIM LANGAN

GUTLESS WONDERS INDEED

By now, most readers are all too familiar with the thuggish behavior of what passes for a town board in Hyde Park these days. From summarily repealing the wetlands law to placate their developer masters and campaign contributors and gutting the planning board to last week's firing of a longtime town employee while she visited her ill father in Florida, this board has made Hyde Park a laughingstock.

I realize their antics are probably wearing a little thin for those of you not living in Hyde Park, but the damage these cowards are doing merits continued focus. Because without this newspaper and Channel 22, most folks wouldn't know what was going on at Town Hall. Unfortunately, *The Poughkeepsie Journal* appears clueless or conflicted in their coverage.

I don't use the word "coward" lightly when discussing the four-man wrecking crew that is Tom Martino, Jim Monks, Michael Taylor and Mike Athanas. I call them cowards because they are. Only cowards conspire to fire someone at a "special meeting" when that someone is away at her father's bedside and unable to defend herself. Only cowards hold that meeting at 4:45 in the afternoon to make it as difficult as possible for ordinary citizens to attend. Only cowards establish ground rules that prohibit public input or comment. Only cowards call a 4:45 meeting on a summer Friday to sneak through a law to gut the planning board. You get the feeling these cowards would prefer meeting at 3 in the morning if they thought they could keep Monks awake.

Only cowards feel they need police protection from the very people they are supposed to represent. Only cowards refuse to

answer legitimate questions from *Hudson Valley News*. Only cowards like Michael Taylor lie and say they didn't request the police presence. Only cowards like Monks and Athanas refuse to answer a question from our 17-year-old intern and bark at her. Only cowards refuse to keep Councilwoman Sue Serino in the loop and muzzle her. Only cowards make policies in the dark, behind closed doors, with no public input allowed. Only cowards hide behind their \$175-an-hour lawyer because they don't know what they're doing. Attorney Jim Horan and Martino look like Paul Winchell and Jerry Mahoney most nights. (You youngsters can look that up).

But you get the idea, and here's my point. I don't care what your politics are or what your agenda is. If the voters elect you, then you have every right and an obligation to pursue your agenda. But in order to achieve your objectives, you need to sell it and you sell it by giving the public the facts and an opportunity to weigh in. While it's always important to remember you represent all the voters, it's especially true when you were

elected by a scant 300-plus margin. Yet these guys avoid public interaction like a cockroach does the light of day.

But let's concede their contempt for the public and the process. What I find stunning and telling is there is never even one person who stands up for the gang of four. No one shows up at Town Hall to express their support for Martino and Co. or writes a letter to the editor praising

them. They have no posse whatsoever. Even more illuminating is the fact that none of these guys has the guts or the goods to write a guest column or a letter to the *Hudson Valley News* or any other publication articulating their position. That tells me these guys are cowards and do not have the courage of their convictions.

I am publicly challenging Martino and this board to defend their actions. We will make available as much space as they need to refute the barrage of criticism they have been getting. If they think they're doing the right thing, then show some guts and fight for your agenda. Not doing so only underscores the perception that you are cowards and bullies who do your best work under the cover of darkness. The ball is in your court, but I'm not holding my breath.

Jim Langan can be reached at editorial@thehudsonvalleynews.com.

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GUEST COLUMN

Hyde Park board abusing special meetings

BY POMPEY DELAFIELD

The only legitimate reason for any special/quickly called town board meeting is to approve resolutions that expedite issues that cannot wait for a regularly scheduled meeting or workshop. All other resolutions should be approved only after public discussion in a scheduled public workshop, and obtaining such public input as appropriate: either at a public hearing, a public forum, or during a public comment session at a regularly scheduled town board meeting. Any other method of passing resolutions can only be interpreted as a way of getting them passed without properly informing the public of the implications of the board's actions.

This board has greatly abused the use of special meetings. The only plausible resolution for the meeting of June 16 is possibly to approve the extension of time in the case of the employee if that was required to be done in a timely fashion and missed at the last regularly scheduled meeting as an oversight.

The other items on that agenda needed forum discussion and public input before any action was taken. Of particular note is the seemingly innocuous resolution to change the bookkeeper to comptroller.

- Why is this action brought up (and passed) in a week when the bookkeeper is out of town attending to her ailing father? Has she been involved in the decision?

- Has the board discussed the implications of this decision, and if so, when? (This is not a matter for executive session and the sunshine laws would require that the discussion be public). I have not heard any relevant discussion, so how did this board get ready to vote on this issue?

- Is the board consciously getting rid of Ms. Lown? She is protected under the civil service laws as bookkeeper, but is not eligible for the position of comptroller. Therefore, this amounts to the only legitimate way to fire her. I will personally vouch for the present bookkeeper's integrity and thoroughness in performing her duties for decades of service and I question the advisability of dispensing with that knowledge and stability at this time.

- What are the advantages of hiring a new comptroller? What is the need?

- What is the cost? I have always understood that a comptroller would add increased expenses into the budget.

- Is it wise to make this position a political appointment (remember Enron and their auditors)? This allows any board to hire or fire the bookkeeping arm of the town on a political whim. Is that the intention?

Finally, it is my understanding that the supervisor is trying to say that the lack of an archeological study for the police/court facility is somehow the fault of the last administration. Ridiculous! Not only was

the present supervisor a part of all meetings on the facility during my administration, but he also agreed to work for a scheduled bid date of April/May for the project.

My board, in less than two months, accomplished more than I have seen in six months by this town board. This board has its own advisors (i.e. Morris Associates), who fully understand the need for working with the state on all the many elements of this project, including this archeological study. Supervisor Tom Martino has not brought this problem up in a timely fashion. He also indicated by his statements that the study could have been accomplished easily within the first four months of his term to reach the goal of the scheduled April/May bid of the work. He has not publically (in a workshop) invited his consultants to advise the board on what was needed to meet the schedule, nor publicly committed to any change in that schedule.

Come on, Mr. Supervisor, this sounds like an excuse. Where is the town board going on this project? You've spent your time finding ways to discredit the Water Protection Resource Law, opening up the Bellefield district to unregulated development, rezoning against the stated goals of the town's Comprehensive Plan and removing the Planning Board from their mission to insure that all development meets the laws and the intent of the adopted Hyde Park Town Comprehensive Plan and zoning laws. And these are just the priorities that have been expressed to the public.

Please, town board members, as a citizen of this town, I request that you start doing the work you were elected to do. Quit abusing the use of special meetings to get around your duty to involve the public in your decision-making agenda. Quit trying to find ways to publicly discredit the last administration and disparage the work of our dedicated town employees. That does not accomplish anything.

Let's start working together on a more positive approach to sound legislation, better public communication and involvement, and building, with vision, a better town, a stronger town center and a strong economic base that builds on our strength as a tourist community to bring money and tax dollars to our town from outside, not on destroying those resources through unregulated and uncontrolled growth. This should be your goal and if it is, you are not communicating it to the town in a method that can be understood or appreciated by your constituents. Let's start now to communicate honestly with each other.

Pompey Delafield is the former supervisor of the Town of Hyde Park. Respond to this column at editorial@thehudsonvalleynews.com.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“The Hyde Park Police serve the whole community and aren't intended to be used like bar bouncers at Town Hall or to suppress free speech.”

- Former Hyde Park Chief Don Goddard.