

Banging on the Talbot Preservation Alliance unwarranted

By **ROBERT WIELAND**

Guest comment

On *The Star Democrat's* opinion page, Friday, Feb. 23, there were side-by-side arguments for combating Talbot Preservation Alliance's influence in decision-making at both the county and municipal levels. Although I am not a TPA member, I am not so opposed to TPA's sentiments and, the underlying arguments of both guest comments cry out to be corrected.

Mr. Worsnup's concern is that TPA has too much power in the halls of municipal government. But consider the town of Trappe's recent vote to issue \$60 million in "municipal bonds" to finance the development of public infrastructure for property optioned by private development interests. The private developers of this land will derive considerable benefit from this expenditure and it is a result of their efforts that the money is being borrowed and spent.

When was the last time any government in Talbot mobilized \$60 million for conservation efforts?

Mr. Worsnup should be more concerned about the self-serving power of development interests to radically change the world around us than the princi-

pled arguments of preservationists who are concerned about how things are going to end up.

Mr. Johnston, AICP, argues that development in Talbot is a result of population growth in the country at large. This is misleading. It is not national population growth that is driving land development in Talbot. Rather, it is the promise of life in a more rural setting, marketed with people in the Washington-Baltimore metropolitan areas that sells houses here.

Those folks, especially in the housing-shed for D.C., have realized large gains on their properties as successive administrations have increased the size of the federal government and consequently increased the pressure for housing there. Folks who have been on board for that ride can use their gains to out-compete Eastern Shore natives in the bidding for a place to live. This is what drives development in Talbot.

In many cases, it is just a second home for the person buying from afar and this has more to do with shifts in wealth than population increases. Of course, at some point the rural character is lost, but Mr. Johnston does not seem to mind that.

Mr. Johnston (strangely for certified planner) also

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derides the idea that the county government should take it upon themselves to manage growth and development in Talbot. To whom, if not our local governments, should we wee folks look to off-set the juggernaut of development interests? Is it delusional to think that Talbot County might do as good a job as Kent County has done in keeping its character amenable to the people who live there?

Mr. Johnston has a narrow view of the non-delusional. We can't even hope that our county might do its bit to try to restore the Bay, without apparently crossing that line.

The arguments made in the two anti-TPA columns drive home the old saw that, "where you stand on an issue depends on where you sit." I do not know Mr. Worsnup, but I presume that he or someone close to him has some financial interest in the planning and zoning issues he cites. Likewise, I suspect Mr. Johnston does site work for some of the developers who are being limited by concerns about wider social and environmental impacts of development. That doesn't mean that they can't have anything useful to say on the topic, but readers should be skeptical of their arguments.

Robert Wieland writes from Trappe.