

EDITORIAL

A plan for the city's future

In the hands of the Amsterdam Common Council is a document that suggests updates and new guidelines for the city's zoning ordinance. To most folks, it's probably not what would be considered bedtime reading, but for Amsterdam's elected officials, it's important they closely go through it.

The revisions are the work of a committee of volunteers working through the Montgomery County Economic Development and Planning Department. The goal of rewriting the 100-page document — a task for which the county was hired in late 2009 — was to clean up the language, consider frequently cited issues in neighborhoods, and make changes in line with the 2003 Comprehensive Plan.

Having a proper zoning ordinance is important for any city looking to prosper while maintaining a good living environment. Everything a city offers has its place, and a good zoning ordinance should clearly define where those places are.

At the same time, officials need to ensure that zoning regulations aren't too restrictive and allow people to live as they choose. Being a heavy-handed city isn't going to entice folks to move here. It's a delicate balance.

One interesting issue addressed in the update is the historic resources overlay zone that includes a section of Guy Park Avenue, Guy Park Avenue Extension and the Bridge Street area. It's largely the same area that exists now in the historic resources overlay district, though the current ordinance lays out no guidelines or method of enforcement.

Historic preservation is important to any city, but officials should spend their time and energy on historic buildings that are worth saving. Amsterdam does not need another Chalmers debacle which held up a major reconstruction project designed to spur development on the city's South Side.

Also, the new draft establishes a Historic Review Board that would have to approve windows, doors, siding, demolition, new buildings, additions and more. During a series of ward meetings to discuss the progress of the zoning ordinance update, residents of the Guy Park Avenue area were concerned that the regulations might be too costly.

That concerns us as well. Plus, the last thing Amsterdam needs is another board when there are several already in place, particularly planning and zoning boards, set up to deal with issues like this.

Before the council acts on the revisions, there will be a series of additional reviews and public meetings. We encourage members of the community to review the document for themselves (it's available online at www.mcbdc.com) and share their thoughts and feelings.

We also encourage the council to really take a close look at it before final approval. It's an important document that will impact development in Amsterdam for years to come and will shape the very fabric of neighborhoods throughout the city.

Grill talk



BY KEVIN MATTISON

I do not take lightly the rare occasions upon which I am allowed to refer to myself as King of the Grill.

I would, perhaps, if the title was self-appointed; if I decided that my big, shiny grill, long-handled flipping, spinning and turning utensils, and adjunct meat smoking vessel warranted a title change and bump in husbandly respect.

Which it does. But that's not my point. It is because of my neighbors, who, many years ago, bought me a sign that hangs high and proudly on the screen porch. The sign reads: King of the Grill.

For this reason — the only reason I need — I come to you on this great American holiday weekend with helpful tips and advice for the meals you plan to serve on this celebrated occasion of outdoor food cooking.

There is no need for gratitude. I do this out of the kindness of my heart and out of the respect I have for raw food. Yours included.

Food should not die in vane. It should die, mind you, but it shouldn't be served next to a warm mayonnaise-based salad covered in fly footprints. That would be in vane. And gross.

Sidebar: Speaking of dead food, I unintentionally stirred up a hornet's nest last weekend by posting on Facebook a photo, from my innocent nephew's innocent high school graduation party, of a whole innocent pig, lying prone upon a giant outdoor cooking vessel, suspended above a gigantic bed of smoldering wood coals.

Mmmm. That's how I want to go. With slathering sauce optional.

And I know what you're thinking. You're thinking: He's on Facebook? How cool is that? I am going to send this awesome guy a friend request right now.

I thought a roasting pig, all juicy and moist and drippy and crackly brown, was a common sight at a pig roast. I thought taking a photo of this marvelous vision would be an acceptable, if not expected, responsibility. I mean, many others at the party were also taking its picture.

Problem came, apparently, when I posted the photo on Facebook. Kinda one of those "nyah, nyah, look how much fun I'm having with my life right now which I bet is a lot more fun and much better than anything going on in your life" posts.

Pretty much the reason Facebook was invented: To rub in the faces of nosy computer-owners who have nothing better to do than share all their boring pictures and inconsequential comments and whom after all these years of ignoring, you now consider to be your "friends" for the sole purpose of rubbing in their faces your much more glorious existence by forcing them to see if the last thing you posted is as captivating, inspirational and hilarious as the one before it.

Well, the dead pig got the exact opposite reaction I was expecting. I thought I would get a thousand "likes," a bunch of "yums," and a smattering of "jealous(es)." Instead, I got vitriol.

Which I initially thought would come in handy, because after all that fat-soaked pig flesh I needed a little something to settle my stomach.

Then I realized vitriol isn't the stuff old people drink for gas.

"If slaughter houses had windows, we'd all be vegetarians." "I don't want my food to have a face." "Poor little piggy." ... And these are the

printable comments.

I was derided by a complete stranger who rescues squirrels in her spare time. (Yes. Squirrel rescue is a real thing. ... I know. Me, too.) She demanded I immediately cease posting on the Internet such horrific images. Then she deleted her comments — because she's an obvious coward and incapable of constructive discussion — before I could respond.

I was going to tell her I appreciate her opinion. And squirrels — which I have indeed eaten — taste like chicken. (They really do. I actually believe the phrase "tastes like chicken" comes from squirrels. Or maybe frogs.)

Anyway, this tiny sidebar was intended to point out that a great deal of food — jack o'lanterns included — at one time or another had a face. What better place to share my food picture, I thought, than on a "face" "book."

And with that, the little story comes full circle.

I wanted to make sure today that before you run outside and set the world — and an entire 25-pound bag of briquettes — on fire because you're cooking eight hot dogs for the holiday weekend family reunion, that you are first armed with the proper advice.

If you've just unpacked and assembled your brand new GAS grill and for its maiden voyage you fill it with a different entire 25-pound bag of briquettes, soak them with lighter fluid, and touch them with flame, you need to re-read the instructions. I once had a neighbor who could have used this advice.

Similarly and unrelatedly, if you turn on the gas under your gas grill, fire up the sparkly-lighter things (Note: Glossary term; will be on the final exam), and you hear some of them light but you're not sure all have litten, that probably means one or more hasn't. If you then smell gas, it definitely hasn't. Here's the important part: If some are lit, one still isn't, and that one is pouring gas into the immediate atmosphere, you are about to be treated to a very impressive flash and boom that will scare the bejesus out of you and impress the heck out of your Father's Day visitors.

We learn by doing. I have learned to never do this again. I have also learned that when eyebrows grow back, they're never quite the same.

Make sure, before you light anything, that you determine the lead cord for the rotisserie is not still inside, on the top rack you once considered a very clever and resourceful place to store it. The protective coating on the wires will melt, and the next time you plug it in, because it doesn't look all that bad, it will throw a breaker in the fuse box as you simultaneously drop a klinker. (My bad.)

In the helpful category of actual food use, and for those of you who have seen the pig photo on the Facebook wall, all veggies (which must be dressed in olive oil, salt and pepper) can and should be cooked on the grill. Most grills today have a cast iron griddle off to one side. It was made for veggies. Not corn, though. Corn goes on the main stage. Asparagus can cook on either surface.

But the rest of the dead plants — spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, taters, beans, squashes, your entire aubergine family, fungus — come out finer than fine. I recommend veggies you've never before cooked on the grill. You'll be pleased.

This is how I discovered the joy of grilled fresh spinach. Dump it out of the bag and it covers the entire grill. Two minutes later, it's the size of a dead bat. Yum. (Take that, squirrel lady.)

KEVIN MATTISON is executive editor of the Recorder and probably marinating something. E-mail him at kmattison@recordernews.com. Also, check out his archive of very important things at <http://mattisonsavenue.wordpress.com/>

RECORDER

Vol. 130, No. 286

GENERAL MANAGEMENT

KEVIN McCLARY Publisher
GEOFFREY E. DYLONG Associate Publisher
BRIAN KROHN Advertising/Marketing Director
KEVIN MATTISON Executive Editor
CHARLIE KRAEBEL Editor
WILLIAM BRZEZICKI Business Office Manager

CORPORATE OFFICERS

CREE LEFAVOUR Chairman
SIDNEY LEFAVOUR President
NICOLE LEFAVOUR Vice President
BRUCE LEFAVOUR Secretary
DAVE MURDOCH Treasurer

An independent newspaper founded in 1878
Published in Amsterdam, N.Y.

DOONESBURY

