

## COMMENTARY

## Road to teamwork bumpy at best

The March 13th Fairfield City Council meeting was an invigorating bath in the political humors of those who lead and those who are led.

A new aquatics center has a pricetag of \$13.8 million. The proposed beautiful bathing behemoth will have it all; zero depth lines for the tadpoles, slides, a lazy float river, a four season roof, lap lanes to keep wannabee Mark Spitzes fit and more. Councilman Frank Kardos rightly began to plumb the depths of this aquatic treasure chest and inquired if we could still get the steak without the sizzle by building a pool for a lower pricetag.

We have three high schools pools, one at Solano College and two at a membership club. None are an aquatic center costing \$13.8 million. What is the real cost per bather and how does this affect our lives? Can we build it incrementally? Should we?

Aquatic centers have cache and value and are a type of badge of city's that have truly "arrived." After Kardos's well-reasoned questions, what impressed me were the sounds of silence. We need to hear a wave of rationale or cost benefit analysis wash its way onto the council dais shores before we decide.

Let's not go smacking this Kraken to a watery grave until we discern beauty or beast publicly, in the media and at more council meetings.

As the evening progressed, I



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saw that which leaders and those led should always fear. It was the haunting ghost of William Golding, author of "Lord of the Flies," a novel set with Europe at the brink of nuclear destruction. A group of choir boys survive a tropical island crash-landing and soon descend into chaos, disorder and self-serving self-destruction.

We have a financial situation in Fairfield that could rapidly worsen. That evening, more concerning was the hint of smoke from the kind of primal fires that neither warm hearts nor hearths. It was wafting amidst the parade of folks, threatened with job loss and claiming disillusionment with their chain of command, who were leaning hard and heavy on the council.

Emotionally powerful imagery of a city as family repeatedly rang out. Let's remember that in families and cities alike, responsibilities run in all directions and are not equally distributed. Neither cities nor families are true democracies and although every mother of every family has the most beautiful baby in the world, cities are neither parents nor nannies.

For example, a sincerely moving appeal from a valuable and effective niche community service program led one councilman to leave the dais to console a plaintiff post-cathartic appeal. That program represents outreach to less than 0.1 percent of that in need and there are other thriving concerns that are similar but not iden-

tical at far less cost to the taxpayer. These also reach far more than 100 times as many.

Could strategic alliances and creative synergies be struck?

Similarly, the city looked long and hard at the funding of the arts with a comprehensive plan that is revenue positive, exceeds core needs and portends enormous potential if competing interests and fears can be overcome. Contention reminds us that the road to teamwork is paved with good intentions but not necessarily footprints.

Intelligent strategic resourcing, with maximal retention of jobs, consistent with good business rationale and compassionate governance will win the day. That is a thankless and excruciatingly difficult process.

Tales of bad leadership or management, as well as warnings of impending disaster resulting from unmet needs or wants, are tails that can wag much larger dogs. It is up to the big dogs of of the council to thoroughly vet those competing claims.

So when the call comes from problem-solvers to get in the water, aquatic center or otherwise, fire and police union negotiations, community service and public works layoffs or arts consortia building, please try not to pee in the pool.

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