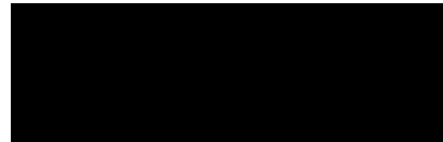


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If you care what I think . . .

There's no fine print to tell you this flyer is paid for by a campaign, or was hatched by a PAC, or emanates from a pseudo-independent front for real estate interests. The simple truth was that I decided it wasn't enough to vote against the incumbents and tell scathing stories to my friends. I spent \$200 to print 1300 copies of this flyer, and \$700 for postage -- just me.

... I think the City of East Lansing is very badly run.

For one thing, the top administrative staff is mediocre, which means the department heads are a motley crew, poorly supervised. The City can't bear to walk away from failed projects, so one after another they pile up in the budget, each continuing to hemorrhage money. In its fantasy, the City sees itself as a cunning real estate operator, leading to their being repeatedly swindled - sometimes by people who weren't trying to steal but were simply lucky bystanders. The mid-level managers marinate in the sleazy atmosphere in which deals are cut with the marijuana lobby and student apartment impresarios. Put it all together, and you get a government that is broke, incompetent, and dishonest.

I've been a County Commissioner for nearly forty years, and Ingham County isn't perfect. But whenever we find ourselves working on a joint project with the East Lansing government, the experience leaves us feeling a lot better about ourselves. I have a lot of exposure to City Hall's inner workings, and I am always surprised to discover things are worse than I thought.

I am tempted to insert several funny/tragic stories about dealing with East Lansing, but that ground has been worked very professionally by EastLansingInfo.org. They've run a series of stories that follow a familiar arc:

1. Something weird happens which comes to the attention of ELi.
2. A reporter is assigned who tries to find out the facts behind the rumor.
3. The situation turns out to be even weirder than the original rumor, pointing to at least one continuing systemic problem.
4. ELi publishes a detailed story, which is met by denials and evasions from City Hall.
5. Nobody is ever disciplined for the mistake, and no procedures are changed.
6. City Hall concludes that the way to deal with such incidents in the future is to refuse to answer questions. New restrictions are implemented against talking to the media or answering FOIA requests.

I guess I know a dozen incidents ELi has never heard about, where people were treated badly without the public ever becoming aware. When a tree falls in a forest but ELi doesn't hear it, the waste and destruction caused by City Hall's incompetence are just as real to the people who are the victims. The issues run the gamut: wasted tax money, self-defeating bureaucratic rules, vindictive prosecutions, sleazy give-aways to developers. Some are just head-slapping cases of stupidity.

The City Manager, George Lahanas, is in over his head. He may have been a fine financial manager, but he is a weak administrator, and has allowed himself to become tainted by becoming identified as Mark Meadows' go-fer. City department heads have learned to do their jobs outside Lahanas' control, for better or worse. Eventually, Lahanas will have to leave, but under the Charter, it takes a 4-to-1 vote to get rid of him, and that will take years.

Nor will getting rid of Lahanas move things along very far; additional years will be required to weed out the underperforming department heads, and to restore performance expectations. Then still more years will be required to repair the City's finances, since the Council has borrowed millions to finance their real estate schemes, and mortgaged decades of future tax revenues with excessive tax abatements given as incentives so developers would do things they wanted or had to do anyway.

Mark Meadows deserves much of the credit for creating this nightmare, mainly during his previous stint in office. (1995-2006, before he was elected to the legislature.) When Erik Altmann was elected four years ago, he ran as an outsider, but once in office he quickly became a reliable vote for whatever scheme Meadows was peddling at that moment. This November, the best we can hope is to be rid of one of them.

There are three seats up for election, but only two serious challengers. I'm voting for Lisa Babcock and Jessy Gregg, who seem as appalled by City Hall as sensible people should be. That means - at the very best - either Meadows or Altmann is going to be reelected. At the very worst, both of the incumbents will be returned, and the voters' decision will come down to whether Babcock or Gregg is selected to join Aaron Stephens, as the two member minority which Meadows and Lahanas trample and humiliate at council meetings.

Your third vote could be spent harmlessly on either John Revitte or Warren Stanfield, who are irrelevant. If you happen to dislike deer, Revitte is a good choice since he seems to be running mainly on a platform to extirpate them. But you can vote for him even if you like deer, since he's not going to be elected. Stanfield was apparently planning to run for office on Mars but the paperwork was sent here by mistake.

At most, this fall's election will only make a marginal difference. It took a long time to get things this screwed up, and it'll take a long time to fix them. Please forgive my lack of optimism, but here we are.

Peace!



-mark grebner