

COMMENTARY

“YOU BETTER THINK! (About what you’re doin’ to me)” — Aretha Franklin



For the most part, Fort Myers City Council members are just a bunch of fat old white guys (FOWGs) who have trouble thinking. And if they aren't, then they're just a bunch of fat old black guys (FOBGs) who have the same trouble as the FOWGs.

Don't let me forget Mayor Jim Humphrey, for good measure — another FOWG who isn't thinking.

And do you know who else isn't thinking? Every single member of the Lee County Commission (thank God there's one female commissioner who can mitigate the endless paving of our leadership with FOWGs. She's like one of those little "wetlands" you see in the median between two big strips of highway; as pleasant as that is, she isn't thinking, either, I don't think).

Oh yeah, let me include senior staffers on the list: city and county managers, directors of this 'n' that, managers of the muckety-muck (almost always men). Apparently they've forgotten how to think, too.

There's an easy, lucrative, inexpensive way out of this Boston Red Sox spring training quandary: Let them go. Better than that, encourage them to go. The Sox are threatening to move elsewhere with their spring-training money, Sarasota maybe, leaving the downtown stadium

and the local economy as stripped as an old mine. The solution to that problem begins with a new, high-tech thing called thinking, something city and county officials have not thought to undertake, so far.

As it stands, if officials manage to keep the Sox here, city and county residents are going to become a lot poorer than they already are, because huge amounts of their taxes will end up supporting the Boston Red Sox. In this personification, the Sox are not a baseball team; they're a business, run by unsentimental Yankee traders. Meanwhile, Fort Myers still owes \$19.6 million or so in principal alone (plus a few million in interest) on the stadium that stands downtown, which requires \$1.6 million each year in county money just to maintain.

The Sox business organization has benched most of the prominent local governments in Southwest Florida in the dug-out of their own stupidity. This slick-o named Mike Dee cruises into town (our town or someone else's), and suddenly he's pulling strings like a puppet-master.

Dee comes from the Red Sox "front office" up in Bean-town. That's a misnomer and a lie right there, which ought to tip you off to the presence of a con-man, since his office probably couldn't be located by a tank battalion or a re-con platoon, and it's certainly not in front of anything. Worse, it's not up front with anything, either.

Mike Dee is a liar — he's paid to be, that's his job. In late spring or summer he told the local newspaper that the Sox had no plans to move or to break their contract

to conduct spring training downtown until 2019.

He lied through his teeth, in my opinion. I know he's been called "good people" by some county officials — Deputy County Manager Bill Hammond comes to mind, and Bill really is good people, even though he's not thinking right now, which would make him even better people.

But Mike Dee is not "good people." He's a businessman who will take us to the cleaners, if we let him.

So Mike Dee needs to take his little butt permanently back to Bean-town and we can all part friends, I think. Or maybe not, but let's not let that be our problem.

That isn't happening, though, because city and county officials are not thinking. Instead, they're climbing all over themselves to spend millions and millions of our tax dollars during the worst economic crisis since 1930.

The city might be willing to expand the stadium complex, or the county might build a big fat new complex so the few poor little rich boys who actually play the game of baseball don't have to walk too far to the field, the hotel, the mall, the restaurant or their big fat cars.

And that's how we handle the Red Sox front office, by offering to throw money at them?

That's just stupid, stupid, stupid, and even the only talked-about alternative I've heard, another baseball team downtown, is based on a muddled, short-sighted thought process, too.

Here's why: soccer.

Even though the fat old white guys and the fat old black guys did not grow up with

soccer, anybody aware that human life exists beyond Lee County has known for years that soccer's the biggest sport in the world. People crowd into soccer games on five or six of the seven continents. They travel vast distances, staying in hotels and eating in restaurants when they get there.

Give officials about \$250,000 to work with. With that money, and with a few well-placed phone calls and a little marketing, they could easily turn City of Palms Park into the best little soccer stadium in America, couldn't they?

No, not if they don't think about it.

The FOWGs and the FOBGs might not realize it, but about 100,000 people in this county are Hispanic, and many of them love soccer. So do all the little Anglo kids who are learning to love soccer by actually playing it (fact: it's a lot healthier than baseball, because you run hard instead of chewing gum hard most of the time).

Not only that, but imagine the bright, brawny, big-spending mobs that would fly in from cold, damp European places like Manchester or Birmingham or Chelsea-London or Dublin or Spain or Germany or Turkey; or from American places like Chile and Brazil and Argentina and Mexico; or from Australian places like Sidney, or from Chinese places like Beijing (the Chinese love to come here, and we could feed 'em some decent non-toxic milk if they don't like our beer).

Can you imagine how much we could make if we sent the Sox permanently over the center-field wall, going north?

Yes, you probably can. But so far, that's beyond the ken of city and county officials. ■

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