

## Readers lend their voices... (continued)

lost forever. We are concerned about noise from increasing air traffic that would have no restrictions. We are concerned about whether anyone would ever enforce any regulations on a private business property. We do not oppose growth or an increase in local economy, but we know there are other local areas where Bero could successfully conduct this business.

We are amazed and saddened by the disrespect we have been shown by the proponents of this zone change application and all their supporters during the hearing process. We are speaking up for what we believe in, yet our testimony has been laughed at and we have been accused of having an "agenda". Some of our neighbors have had Bero stand in the road and take pictures of their property, and others have heard he has plans to sue us if we continue objecting to his proposal. Yet as the process unfolds, it seems that everyone has made up their mind that Bero's generous proposal of creating jobs for Vernonian's warrants exceptions to all the rules. There have been no guarantees that jobs will actually all go to Vernonian's, and there is no mention of what happens if the business doesn't fly in this economy (excuse the pun). Will he tear his buildings back down? We doubt it. We'll be looking at those buildings whether they have any business in them or not.

And lest we forget, Bero is a businessman. However generous his proposal may seem, entrepreneurs do business for one primary reason; profit. And that's the real bottom line. If Bero didn't think he could make a bunch of money for himself, he certainly wouldn't be creating any jobs.

Lee and Addie Duvall  
Vernonia

On Dec 1st, my husband and I attended the Columbia County Board of Commissioner public hearing regarding the request for a zone change on behalf of Tim & Michelle Bero and their 27.8 acres that they own near the airport. The hearing was to hear "new" testimony only.

There were many things said in this meeting, some of it was redundant, some of it inaccurate, some if it very personal, and some if it held merit. At the end of the meeting Tim & Michelle Bero were given time to rebut testimony given from the opposing side. Their Lawyer Mr. Mark Greenfield and business associate Mr. Glomb from Poland both gave a brief rebuttal to clarify a few mistakes made in the information provided by their opponents, but Tim and Michelle offered no rebuttal. I was surprised because they clearly had much more they could have added to clear up some very obvious misinformed statements and the assumptions made. I asked Tim and Michelle why they did not stand up and correct the incorrect information that was given, and they simply replied that they had provided the documents that supports their claims, to the committee that needed to have the information, and that they were not going to waste anyone else's time trying to convince them of something they don't want to hear.

My husband and I gave our testimony in support of the project proposed by the Bero's, and did so because we feel it is a well thought out plan that will bring light industry to a community that desperately needs jobs and revenue. With the Bero's plan, the city will have the opportunity to develop the airport, providing options for development and income not previously available. But no matter if I am for or against their development plans and the zone changes proposed, the reason for my letter is to provide some clarity to a couple issues I feel need to be addressed.

During this hearing the Proponents stated their "facts" and sat down. There were no finger pointing, no name calling, nor did anyone single out another person. On the other hand, when the opponents of the Bero's plan began their testimony, it was made very personal against Tim and Michelle. Rude comments were made, people testified over and over again about where the Bero's should take their business and how they should or should not conduct their business. Comments were made against the Bero's personally, fingers were pointed, and then sighs, or looks of complete and utter dismay were given to the people testifying on such a personal level, (the worse coming from not the home owners themselves, but by people who claimed they were in support of the homeowners), the proponents were then accused of being disrespectful while the opponents gave their testimony.

I have to add here, as land owners, we all have the right to petition the county for zone changes, and land development. The hearings are a way of due process to ensure that the impact of the zone changes and land use, takes into consideration the rights of the neighboring people, and the wildlife and environmental issues that may be affected by change. These hearings are not a place to tell another person where or how to run their business, nor it is a place to tell them what to do with their land. Despite my own desire to address landowners who use their land as a land fill, it is still a free country, and the land that is in question for zones changes belongs to the Bero's.

So, if there were signs of frustration during the opponents testimony, it was based on pure amazement at the amount of inaccurate statements and personal attacks on the Bero's, and being required to hear not facts, but testimony given over and over again on how the Bero's should use "THEIR" land and how they should conduct "THEIR" business. Please keep in mind, these statements were coming from people who want "their right" to a good view from "their land", and "their right" to have a quiet road, and "their right"(although they bought houses and properties across from an airport zoned for airport and commercial use and development) to not have light industry brought to their neighborhood. I hope those reading this can see the irony of the statements being made here.

Tim and Michelle Bero have been residents of Vernonia for over 18 years. They have experienced floods, the rebuilding, and more. In their first 5 years of conducting business in Vernonia they put over \$700,000 of payroll into the community each year,

and for the last 13 years conducting business in Vernonia they put our over half a million dollars of payroll each year. They provide jobs locally. That should be appreciated!

Tim and Michelle have sponsored Fire Awareness Kits for VRFPD, spent thousands of dollars in community support for fireworks, and Toy and Joy. They have sponsored T-Ball, Baseball, Soccer, and Boy Scouts. They have lived in this community, supported this community, been actively involved in this community, and raised their family in this community. I found it totally offensive to take one of your most prominent Vernonia residents and business owners, and tell them to take their business elsewhere.

It was mentioned that the home owners that may be affected by this plan are not being taking into consideration. With the number of hearings allowed and time provided for them to find support for their goals, I would have to say that is not true. Additionally, when they mentioned their way of life would change and that for some there may be displacement. I'd like to respond by asking them to remember the number of people who have lived in Vernonia, loved their lives in Vernonia, yet had to move because they could no longer afford the commute to jobs outside of Vernonia because there were none available in Vernonia. I'd like them to consider the displacement of other small business who had to move because there was no room for them in Vernonia for light industrial, office space, etc... (Our business being one of them), and I would also like them to consider the displacement and commute they are asking the Bero's to endure by taking their business outside Vernonia.

Vernonia is lucky to have Tim and Michelle Bero in their community, with their willingness to give back, and bring work to the community so Vernonia can thrive. Change is inevitable, and not always easy, but positive change for positive growth, especially in today's economy, should be applauded.

Sincerely,  
Michael & Marie Botchie  
Former Residents and Business Owners in Vernonia  
Still Current Property Owners in Vernonia

To the Editor:

I am writing regarding the ongoing saga on Airport Way. Although I am not personally a resident of Vernonia, our eleven year old non-profit animal rescue organization purchased a property on Airport Way in July of 2007 and we are currently operating a unique "cageless" dog boarding business. As Executive Director of Indigo Rescue, I represent the organization and its interests. We are a small organization but we have a few employee's and lots of hard working volunteers with big hearts. Our hope for our property on Airport Way is to one day profit enough to be able to fund our continued rescue efforts on behalf of abandoned and neglected animals.

We were quite surprised when we learned about Tim Bero's plans for the former Nice property. The application to rezone the Primary Forest property to Airport Industrial, Light Industrial and Community Service Recreational seemed out-of-place for the area. Ironically, some of the things we found most attractive when we chose Vernonia and the property on Airport Way, were the quaint atmosphere of the town and the picturesque rural, forested view from the home. We had immediately started a marketing plan that included promoting to our boarding clients that they could golf, bike the linear trail or fly out of the Vernonia airport for the afternoon, while their dog could spend the day playing with other dogs in a spacious country setting. It never occurred to us that the country flavor of our property might very soon be replaced by the unattractive appearance of an industrial park. When we first heard that Bero had told one of our neighbors his business was going to happen regardless of any application process, we thought he must have been speaking only from arrogance, because we believed the process would be fair and impartial and the probability of a man with a gun manufacturing business being approved to put an industrial park in place of valued Oregon forest property seemed slim.

The surprise was all ours from the time the process began. I have attended all of the meetings during the zone change application process, and I have testified at two of the hearings. It seemed clear from the onset that our neighbors were facing a bias from both the city and the county. We expected that the city would be enamored by the prospect of jobs in a depressed economy, and we figured the county must see the potential for road improvements to be done on someone else's dime. Still, we were surprised by the lack of interest from anyone, in approaching any of the neighboring properties with ideas or compromises. The neighbors have united to try to protect our properties and the wildlife. We divided up to do the research and we consulted with individuals from several state agencies. We learned that there were numerous legal obstacles to this zone change (These have been outlined in prior articles.) We have repeatedly outlined the issues we uncovered, yet Columbia County has still recommended approval of the application. The Mayor of Vernonia and a representative from the Economic Development Department have both testified that we must have some kind of "agenda" if we object to this application. One of the men on the Planning Commission panel mouthed the words "We're for you" to Mr Bero during one of the hearings. During the recent meeting before the Board of Commissioners, the Chair frequently seemed to get annoyed and spoke sarcastically toward several of the neighbors during their testimony. Supporters of the Bero application snickered and made faces during our testimony. It's as if they have forgotten any of the neighbors have a single right. As if they are screaming at us to get out of their way! Our disappointment goes beyond the tone and direction the process appears to be leaning. We feel as if we are going through a process that is only being conducted because it is required, and remarkably, no one has ever indicated to any of us that we have a single legitimate concern.

All of our disappointment aside, there are legitimate concerns, as well as legal issues. Our hope is that the process, if taken to the state appeal level, will recognize those issues and assure what we have always hoped for; a fair and impartial process. If the zone change application is approved, we can only hope that it is done with respect for the neighbors and their properties, which will all be adversely affected.

Respectfully,  
Heather Hines, Executive Director  
Indigo Rescue

To the Editor:

I have been a resident of Vernonia for over 16 years. My husband works in the Timber industry and I work at the Local Grade School. Our family owns 10.5 acres on Airport Way and we have horses, dogs, cats and chickens. My husband and I raised our three children here. We have been in many parades and Jamborees with our dogs, ponies and horses. Many of you might know my daughter Sarah, who was the Vernonia Branch manager for US Bank until she stayed home to be with her new baby girl. Our family has given horse back riding lessons, we have church camp and we have boarded and trained horses and have helped many kids who had no place to stay.

Although we have survived two floods and worked hard to help others during their struggles, we can't help but feel we're being overlooked by our community during the process involving the proposed zone change made by Tim and Michele Bero. Mr. Bero came to my house last year, just after the flood and introduced himself as my new neighbor. He pointed to the view from in front of my home and told me the beautiful mountains, three ponds, and the valley that is filled with wildlife is going to be gone. Industrial business is coming, and he pointed and told me it would be in front of my house. He said you won't even know I'm there. I'm expanding the runway. Planes will land more often. I'll make it look like a barn, and it will fit in. I told him I hadn't heard of any zone change and when I asked about the zone change process he told me I was an "idiot" to think the airport was not going to expand. He informed me it was already a "done deal".

The county sent us a letter shortly telling us about the proposed zone change. I was naive but I knew I had rights too. I thought the law was in place to protect and help us from land developers who come in with their money and buy and build wherever they want to.

When we went to the Planning Commission hearing in Columbia County, the neighbors and I felt we were treated with disrespect and rudeness. While we were at the podium giving our testimony, one of the Commission members mouthed the words "We're for you." to Mr. Bero seated in the audience, while pointing to the commission members to the side of him. Many people witnessed this and we were shocked by this behavior. This month we had a similar experience at the Scout Cabin when the County Commissioners were to hear our testimony and the tone toward us was very condescending.

The Vernonia Airport is already zoned Industrial. Many years ago when Mr. Hyde was the Mayor, he fought to make the zone change for Mr. Bero but after it was done, Mr. Bero decided not to do his business there. He wants an Airport, but Mr. Bero already has his own airstrip on Timber Rd., why does he need another? Why does he need to take our property values, peace and quiet. There are also alternative Industrial zoned options empty and ready to do business so he could have his business without filling in a wetland and destroying a big game habitat. Shouldn't he have looked into the wetlands and other concerns before he bought his property, or did he believe they were irrelevant? The eagle and Blue Heron as well as other migratory birds use these ponds and the Elk graze here in large numbers.

The "small barn" Bero first told me about has changed and is now being described as a 35,000 square foot Flex building with parking, and our private gravel road is going to be filled with cars and trucks. As it is currently, if you meet someone on the road you have to back-up or pull into someone's driveway. Just since Bero purchased his property the road is full of potholes because the 15 mph speed limit is being ignored. Bero himself has been speeding up and down the road in front of our home to "exercise" his dogs (who chase his truck.) Mr. Bero slammed his fists down on Pat Zimmerman's car while she pulled in to the Scout Cabin this year to speak at the "Meet the Candidates" event. No one stopped him then either. Have you ever visited the TNR Firearms website and read the blogs from Bero's current business? We can't help but be afraid of what the future might hold for our quiet little neighborhood.

I am all for Vernonia business and jobs but I thought everyone in the community mattered, too. Everyone talks about the commute, but the reason why we moved to Vernonia is to have this valley atmosphere and country living. My parents lived in Gales Creek and worked in Beaverton. They wanted the country life and accepted their commute in exchange for the lifestyle they chose. If you want to live next to malls and busy industrial areas, you move into town.

I gave to this community and was hoping to be considered as part of this town. We don't have much but what we do have we would love to keep, not only for ourselves but many people who enjoy the beauty of Vernonia and all the individuality this town holds. We should hold on to what makes this place special.

Sincerely,  
Tim and Tammy Sook  
Vernonia

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