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Central School block is a strategic opportunity

Important for the City Council to build consensus

At a time when the demand for housing is high in Astoria, the opportunity to develop an entire city block is especially timely.

In Astoria, if you stand in the same place long enough, a certain turn of events will come around again. In the late 1980s, the Astoria School District razed Central School, originally called Lewis and Clark School. Some 16 years later, a private developer proposed to put that full city block into housing.

Not surprisingly at that time, adjacent property owners — who had become used to open space — were anxious, and they raised concerns. The economic downturn curtailed the project.

Now a new developer proposes housing on the Central School block. And he does so at a time when Astoria's housing vacancy rate is approaching or

effectively at zero.

Edward Stratton reported in last Tuesday's edition that the site's neighbors are in the process of consolidating their concerns. It is equally important that city planners and the City Council develop a consensus on what can happen with a site of this strategic significance.

It is easy to get hung up on rules and miss the big picture. That is why the concept of performance zoning appeared in the 1970s. The idea was to develop a desired outcome and then modify the rules to achieve that goal.

This is an opportunity for more housing, as well as an opportunity for innovation.

Timber merger will cement arrogance

Combined company will be nation's largest private landowner

Studying a map of Weyerhaeuser and Plum Creek's timberland ownership is like trying to read tea leaves in an effort to discern the future of forest communities. Across large swaths of rural America, the proposed merger of these huge landowners will have very tangible consequences.

Post-merger, the combined company will be the nation's largest private landowner.

Weyco's Doyle Simons will be president and CEO, while Plum Creek's Rick Holley, who is nearing retirement, will continue in a leadership position as non-executive chairman, according to *Barron's* magazine.

"The deal is a testament to Weyerhaeuser's transformation under Simons in the past two years and his drive to unlock value," *Barron's* gushes. If regulators OK the deal, "Plum Creek's expertise in real estate and optimizing land values" will be beneficial to Weyco's growth. Other analysts expect the combined firm to immediately shave \$100 million annually in what are euphemistically called "hard synergies" — cost savings in the form of layoffs and other cuts in operating expenses.

From a purely capitalistic standpoint, shareholders will see more money squeezed from the company's more than 13 million acres. This will include incremental gains for all who carry a sliver of Weyco-Plum Creek stock in their retirement portfolios. Employees who survive the merger will likely be more secure in a corporation that has solidified its global competitiveness.

For local communities, the process of "unlocking value" promises to continue Weyerhaeuser's

march away from paying anything more than lip service to corporate citizenship. In northwest Montana, where Plum Creek has large holdings, this sparks concerns about having to pay for recreational land access — a policy much beloved by Weyco.

This is a long way from the Weyco's postwar advertising as "the tree-growing company." Weyco's switch to the real estate investment trust form of organization minimizes federal tax payments while increasingly turning forests into fungible assets, easily sold or converted to other purposes. With the population expected to rapidly increase west of the Cascades this century, Weyco will doubtless maximize profits by converting some lands in the Columbia-Pacific region to housing. There are communities in which this will be welcome — a growing population needs more housing. Such transformative land-use changes should be decided upon by local citizens and agencies, but they will find it difficult to contest proposals by a corporate behemoth.

(For a historical perspective on these timber companies, see George Ochenski's column in *The Missoulian*: tinyurl.com/nsr-97wr.)

Weyerhaeuser is already so big it effectively doesn't care what anybody thinks. The long history of concentrating land ownership in fewer hands strongly suggests that such arrogance will be further cemented by this marriage between two giants of America's corporate "landed gentry." There will a relentless focus on the bottom line, forest access will be restricted, workers will be squeezed and state legislatures will comply with what Weyco wants.

Trump, meet a Syrian refugee named Heba

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF
New York Times News Service

LESBOS, Greece — Ben Carson has compared Syrian refugees to rabid dogs. Donald Trump says that he would send them back.

Who are these Syrian refugee monsters who terrify U.S. politicians?

Meet Heba, a frightened, desperate 20-year-old woman who dreams of being an artist and has just made a perilous escape from territory controlled by the Islamic State in northern Syria.

She was detained two months ago with her sister by Islamic State enforcers because her sister's baby girl had too short a skirt — even though the baby was just 3 months old.

"That was crazy," Heba said, shaking her head. "This was an infant!"

Heba says she and her sister argued that infant girls should have a little leeway in showing skin, and eventually the family was let off with a warning.

But Heba, strong-willed and self-confident, perhaps had been too outspoken or too sarcastic, and the police then cast a critical eye on her clothing. She was covering even her hands and face, but the authorities complained that her abaya cloak wasn't loose enough to turn her into a black puff that concealed her form. The police detained her for hours until her family bailed her out by paying a \$10 fine.

Heba was lucky, for other women have been flogged for violating clothing rules. Her sister saw a woman stoned to death after being accused of adultery.

"If I were wearing this," Heba told

me, pointing down at the tight jeans she was wearing as we spoke, "my head would come off." She offered a hollow laugh.

I spoke to her after she left her mother and siblings behind in Syria (her father died years ago of natural causes) and fled with a handful of relatives on a perilous journey to Turkey, then on a dangerously overcrowded boat to this Greek island. I took Heba and her relatives to a dinner of pizza — Western food is banned by the Islamic State — and as we walked to the pizzeria she made

a game of pointing out all the passers-by who would be decapitated by the Islamic State for improper dress, consorting with the opposite sex or sundry other offenses.

"It's a million percent difference," she exulted of life in the West. "Once you leave that area, you feel so good. Your whole body relaxes."

Americans are understandably afraid of terrorism after the Paris attacks, and that fear is channeled at Syrian refugees. So pandering politicians portray the refugees as

menaces whom the vetting process is unable to screen out, and Americans by nearly 2 to 1 oppose President Barack Obama's plan to admit 10,000 Syrians over a year.

In fact, despite the impressions left by U.S. politicians and by the Islamic State, Syrians are in general more educated and middle class than many other people in the region, and the women more empowered. Heba's aspirations to be an artist aren't unusual.

Security concerns are legitimate, but the refugee screening is a rigorous two-year process. It would be



Nicholas Kristof

far simpler for the Islamic State to infiltrate the U.S. by dispatching European passport holders (like those who carried out the Paris attacks) on tourist visas, or just use supporters who are already U.S. citizens.

The anti-refugee legislation that overwhelmingly passed the U.S. House of Representatives would effectively end the intake even of Christians and Yazidis who have been particularly targeted by the extremists.

In person, Syrian refugees are less scary than scared. Heba wouldn't allow me to use her last name or publish her photo for fear of getting her family in trouble, and she cannot contact her mother for the same reason. (I'm not mentioning the town she lived in because she's terrified that the Islamic State might try to identify and punish her family for her escape and for her candor to a Western journalist.)

Really, Ben Carson, you want to compare this freedom-loving woman to a rabid dog?

Donald Trump, when you said of Syrian refugees, "If I win, they're going back," do you really intend to deport Heba back to the Islamic State to be flogged or decapitated?

Heba is fed up with violence and extremism — but now in the West she encounters a new kind of political extremism that targets refugees like her. These Syrian refugees find themselves accused of potentially being the terrorists they flee.

"We have no connection to terrorism," she told me, mystified that anyone could fear her. "We're running away from all that."

Heba showed me her abaya, which she keeps in her backpack. She says she never wants to wear it again, so I asked why she doesn't discard it.

"I'm scared," she admitted. "If they send us back, I will need it."

Ben Carson and Donald Trump, Heba is neither a rabid dog nor a crazed terrorist but a desperate young woman whose life is on the line. Let's drop the fearmongering and let Heba cast away that abaya forever.

Tales of the super survivors

By DAVID BROOKS
New York Times News Service

The age of terror is an age of shocks. Individuals, families and whole societies get torn apart by unexpected stabbings, shootings and bombings.

It's horrible, of course, but over the past few years the findings of academic research into the effects of these traumas have shifted in a more positive direction. Human beings are more resilient than we'd earlier thought. Many people bounce back from hard knocks and experience surges of post-traumatic growth.

In the first place, post-traumatic stress disorder rates are lower than many of us imagine. According to a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only about 13 percent of the first responders on 9/11 had symptoms that would qualify as a stress disorder. Only about 13 percent of the people who saw the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in person experienced PTSD in the next six months. The best general rule for all of society seems to be that at least 75 percent of the people who experience a life-threatening or violent event emerge without a stress disorder.

Even many of those who are unlucky enough to fall victim to the horrific pain of PTSD are able to recover and rebuild better lives. These are people you sometimes meet who have experienced the worst in life but still radiate love and joy. They get to live a second life and correct the mistakes they made before the earthquake shook everything loose.

As Philip A. Fisher, a University of Oregon psychology professor, noted in an email, the big background factor that nurtures resilience is unconditional love. The people who survive and rebound from trauma frequently had an early caregiver

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There are some foreground factors, too, traits super survivors tend to have that enable them to come back stronger than ever. These people are often deluded in good ways about their own abilities, but completely realistic about their situations. That is to say, they have positive illusions about their own talents, and an optimist's faith in their own abilities to control the future. But they have no illusions about the world around them. They accept what they have lost quickly. They see problems clearly. They work hard. Work is the reliable cure for sorrow.

Recovering from trauma is mainly an exercise in storytelling. As Richard Tedeschi, a psychology professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, has pointed out, trauma is a shock that ruptures the central story that you thought was your life. The recurring patterns that make up life are disrupted. The sense of safety is lost. Having faced death, people in these circumstances are forced to confront the elemental questions of life.



David Brooks

But some people are able to write a new story. As Tedeschi writes, post-traumatic growth comes not from the event but from the struggle afterward to write a new story that imagines a life better than before. Researchers have found that people who thrive after a shock are able to tell clear, forward-looking stories about themselves, while those who don't thrive get stuck ruminating darkly about the past.

Book 1 is life before the event. Book 2 is the event that shattered the old story. But Book 3 is reintegration, a reframing new story that incorporates what happened and then points to a more virtuous and meaningful life than the one before.

These are intensely moral narratives that describe a life of higher purpose. Viktor Frankl survived the Holocaust and concluded that those who could best survive the camps were those who could satisfy their hunger for lives of meaning. Even if they were suffering, they could direct their attention toward those they loved and those they would serve in their future lives.

Frankl, who went on to become a professor of neurology and psychiatry, cited Nietzsche's dictum that he who has a why to live for can endure almost any how. The stories super survivors tell have two big themes: optimism and altruism.

It's interesting that this age of terrorism calls forth certain practical skills — the ability to tell stories, the ability to philosophize and define a meaning to your life. Just as individuals need moral stories if they are going to recover, so probably do nations. France will most likely need a parable to make sense of what happened, just as the United States still has competing parables about the meaning of 9/11.

This is why foreign policies that pursue amoral realpolitik are always impractical. If a country can't discern a moral purpose in its foreign policy, it will lack resilience. It will lack the capacity to bounce back from an attack. It will lack a satisfying narrative and lose the ability to thrive in terror's wake.

The good news is there is no reason to be pessimistic during the war on terrorism. Individuals and societies are tough and resilient, and usually emerge from attacks better than before.