

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Weighing in on city zoning

The controversy over Verizon Wireless' application to build a 70-foot cell tower in north Baker City has spurred interest among some residents in a topic that generally draws scant attention: zoning.

The city is divided among multiple zones — residential, commercial and industrial being the three main types. Each zone has specific guidelines for the types of buildings, businesses and other developments allowed.

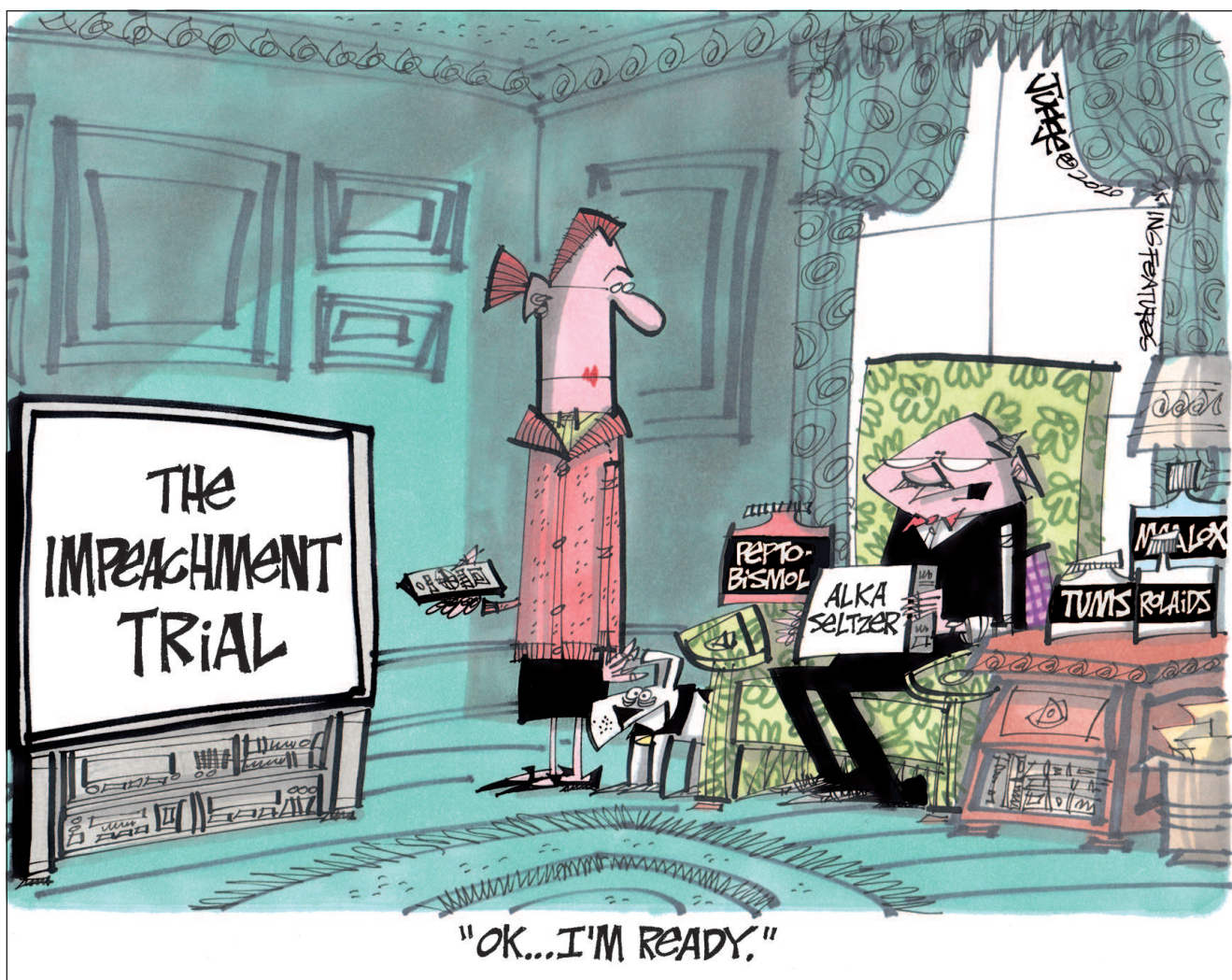
Many critics of Verizon's proposed tower — the City Council on Tuesday voted to deny the application, upholding a Dec. 4 decision by the Planning Commission — have pointed out that although the parcel where the tower was proposed is zoned industrial, much of the area near Leo Adler Field is residential. Opponents of the tower suggested that the industrial parcel, in a largely residential neighborhood, is something of an oversight.

Industrial properties, as you might expect, allow certain types of developments, including cell towers, that are prohibited in residential zones.

It happens that the Planning Commission has recently been discussing zoning, and in particular the prospect of changing the zoning for some parts of the city.

This, then, is an opportune time for citizens to suggest potential changes. The Planning Commission will meet Feb. 19 at 6 p.m. at City Hall, 1655 First St. The meeting is open to the public.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

Citizens should voice opposition to cap and trade

The citizens of Baker County should be writing to their representatives in Salem. If a walkout is necessary to stop

the cap and trade bill then it should be done. Kate Brown again is trying to force something through not caring what the voters want. It will take a toll on jobs and prices on everything here. Further

causing more problems for the seniors here. We can't take anymore of the tax, tax, tax mentality in government.

Richard Wolfe
Baker City

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Donald Trump: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1414; fax 202-456-2461; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov/contact.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Pendleton office: 310 S.E. Second St. Suite 105, Pendleton 97801; 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington,

D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, fax, 541-624-2402; walden.house.gov.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

Baker City Hall: 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-

6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Mike Downing, Loran Joseph, Randy Schiewe, Lynette Perry, Arvid Andersen, Larry Morrison and Doni Bruland.

Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Fred Warner Jr., city manager; Ray Duman, police chief; John Clark, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

Baker County Commission: Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.

'1917' reveals the Great War as no film before

"What was it like?"

It is, perhaps, the ultimate question in human existence.

A universal one, anyway.

Each of us wonders at some point how it would have been to experience some event that for whatever reason we did not, or could not.

Sometimes we can at least partially satisfy this curiosity because we know somebody who was there and so can put the question directly — to query a parent about what they remember from the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated, or prevail upon an older sibling to describe a rock concert you were too young to attend.

But I think this desire to understand that which you can never know personally, which is to say viscerally, is particularly acute when the event in question is both historically momentous and so distant in time that no one is still alive who was there.

For me the event that most strongly piques my curiosity is the First World War, which ended in 1918.

It has been so for nearly 30 years. What happened is that I took a European history course at the University of Oregon. I chose the class, as near as I can remember, on little more than a whim. But the great power of education is to influence, if not the course of our lives, then at least our interests.

In the hours I spent in a stuffy classroom that spring in Eugene I learned for the first time more about the Great War — as it was known until war again engulfed Europe in 1939 — than the superficial elements of muddy trenches and machine guns and daring pilots whose scarves whipped about in the slipstream of the open cockpits of their rickety biplanes.

As I came to understand the sheer futility and horror that



JAYSON JACOBY

soldiers in that conflict endured, I reached a point where each new book I read, no matter how well crafted, was unable to enrich the texture of my knowledge. Worse, as I accumulated data and anecdotes, my compulsion to truly know about the war deepened, and my frustration at being powerless to answer that ultimate question — "What was it like?" — began to tarnish the experience of reading.

But now I have had an epiphany.

I watched the new film, "1917."

And although it would gratify me to be proved wrong, I strongly suspect that those two hours I spent in the Eltrym — a period I scarcely noticed as it passed — will mark the nearest I'll ever get to that most elusive answer.

Director Sam Mendes, who dedicated "1917" to his grandfather Alfred, a British soldier in the Great War, has created not only the finest war movie I've seen, but among the best films of any genre.

Mendes did this in large part by eschewing many of the clichés that define feature films about wars, and in particular the tropes of the Great War.

"1917" doesn't include scenes of a massive, set-piece battle where thousands of soldiers brandishing bayonet-tipped rifles rush across no man's land, to be mowed down, as corn by the swings of a scythe, by machine guns.

(Although such things did happen, dozens of times.)

Indeed I don't recall even seeing a machine gun in "1917."

What I did see, thanks to cinematographer Roger Deakins'

deft work, is an intensely detailed depiction of the experience of traveling through trenches, across the desolation of no man's land, and amid the rubble of a French village left in shambles by artillery bombardments.

Mendes used intimate methods in which cameras frequently were directly behind or in front of the two British lance corporals who are the film's main characters. Viewers in effect see exactly what they saw, and it is mesmerizing.

At the start of the movie, as the pair trudges from the soft green field where they had been resting, into the gradually descending maw of a trench, I felt the sense that they were being swallowed, as it were, slowly but inexorably, by the war.

As the corporals, Blake and Schofield, hustle along a front-line trench the close up filming, with hand-held cameras, made me a trifle queasy. This is as it should be because, as "1917" made clear, front-line trenches zigzagged often rather than following a straight line. The reason was simple, and brutal — with no long straight sections, enemy soldiers couldn't jump into a trench and shoot for long distances. The pattern of frequent jogs in the trenches' direction also tended to confine the dreadful effects of artillery shells exploding in or near trenches.

(Although the machine gun is the characteristic weapon of the Great War, that being the first conflict in which such guns were employed to their ultimate bloody effect, artillery was by far the most murderous part of the combatants' arsenals, causing around 70% of the deaths and wounds on the battlefields.)

When Blake and Schofield prepare to climb the wooden ladders that will take them from the

putative safety of the trench into the terribly exposed no man's land I felt, more than with any other film, a sense of the awful anxiety — the incredible difference that comes with stepping on a couple of rungs.

As the pair crosses the geographic paradox that is that land between the lines — the distance so modest, the life-changing implications of this span of tortured ground so immense — I could hear the squelch of their boots in the mud, the rustle of their khaki woolen uniforms, the metallic clink of their .303 Lee-Enfield rifles twisting in their slings.

But unlike other renowned World War I films, such as "All Quiet on the Western Front" and "Paths of Glory," in "1917" no man's land is quiet, empty except for corpses and rats. The Germans have recently retreated to a new defensive line — they called it the Siegfried Line, the Allies' moniker was the Hindenburg Line.

This withdrawal defines the film's plot.

A general has ordered Blake and Schofield to carry a message several miles to where two British battalions — around 1,600 men — are preparing to attack the next dawn on the mistaken belief that the Germans retreated because they're nearly beaten. In fact the Germans are trying to lure the British into an ambush. And one of the soldiers likely to be killed in this ill-fated attack is Blake's brother.

Historians often describe World War I as the first "modern" war. This term has multiple meanings, but the one that has always seemed to me the most terrible, and all the more compelling as a result, is its impersonality. This was industrial war, a battle not so much between soldiers as between societies and the capacities of their factories, a war in which an individual's abili-

ties, and moreover his bravery, had no more influence on the outcome than a single snowflake has on the severity of a blizzard.

Filmmakers generally have sought to depict this reality by showing, as graphically as contemporary technology allows, the horror of an industrial battlefield — men whose limbs are slashed from their bodies by the steel splinters of shells, men who are, almost literally, atomized by a direct hit.

This is an undeniably effective technique.

But Mendes, rather than rely largely on ghastly death scenes (although there are a few of those in "1917"), immerses the audience in the experience of Blake and Schofield, two among the millions. And for me this tactic expressed the futility of any soldier; the powerlessness and the seeming inevitability of pain and death, more succinctly, and believably, than even the most faithfully reproduced battle scene involving hundreds or thousands.

I will, of course, never know what it was like to go over the top on the first day on the Somme, when 20,000 British soldiers were killed in just a few hours. I will neither cower from a bombardment in the hills above Verdun, nor grasp the dirty wood of a ladder and know that in a few seconds my life might be ended by a bullet or a shell sent on its way by a man I never saw.

But thanks to Sam Mendes I have glimpsed something as never before. I have seen, if not with clarity then with something close to it, the unspeakable situations we once as a society stupidly blundered into, and I have felt the humbling humanity of the ordinary men who had the great misfortune of being the pawns.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.