

OPINION

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Letter to the Editor

Owen Brown

Local officials state that the proposed Hyperscale Data Center Complex will have a positive impact on the community without any downsides. “I would never bring anything into our community that would negatively affect anyone regardless of proximity to anything we do,” Tyler McHugh, Industrial Development Officer. We have been told that the unknown Fortune 100 Company is not like unscrupulous developers and will meet the no-harm standard put forward by our local officials. They intend to be ‘good neighbors.’ Further reassuring statements followed. The development would be confined to around 2000 acres at the center of a 5000-acre footprint, which implied that a large buffer zone and substantial setbacks would be integral. The buildings were to be single-story. Following construction if anyone is impacted negatively at all, the developer will buy their property at fair market value, which amounts to a ‘Get Out Of Jail Free Card.’ However at the last Fiscal Court Meeting, there seemed to be a change in tone. The provisional ordinance might include a 250ft setback, 75ft maximum building height and a 55dB noise limit at a residence (not property line). It was stressed that these numbers were provisional and subject to change. There is a big difference between an ordinance ensuring zero harm and commonly used setbacks and noise limits in places elsewhere. It’s about 1000ft or more.

A noise level of 40dB is common in a rural area. Adding 10dB doubles the audible sound. If that added 10dB is the hum from a Data Center, it can override natural sounds and cause distress. Who decides if industrial noise is causing annoyance? The developer, or residents exposed to it? At a public hearing on Wednesday, the Kimley-Horn ‘expert witness’ repeatedly stated that he would happily live 250ft from a Data Center and a 55dB noise limit was just fine. I give this 4 Pinocchio’s on the whopper scale. A 55dB limit in a rural location is horrible and guaranteed to result in widespread complaints. Before regulations are written in Mason Cty., the developer and Kimley Horn should provide a list of Hyperscale Data Centers built in rural areas not causing community upset so they can be used to guide local decision making. Even better, a steering group comprised of both officials and residents should visit a Data Center ‘campus’ comparable to the one proposed here.

Nuisance level noise is not defined by decibels alone. Constancy and tonal nature are two other factors that need to be considered. Supporters of noisy industry frequently point out that refrigerators, tractors

and highways make noise that we all live with every day. That doesn’t negate the impact of industrial noise on someone’s ability to enjoy living on their property. I recorded noise from an Amazon Data Center in Manassas, Northern Virginia, 250ft from a housing development. It measured 55dB and was very annoying. It was so bad that people were not using their backyards or decks which faced the DC. They were out on the other side of the buildings. There have been many large demonstrations about noise levels in the area.

Data Centers and Industrial Solar are often linked. Solar input to the grid is sponsored by the developer to allow them to claim that they are ‘Carbon Neutral.’ There are thousands of Mason County farmland acres currently leased to Industrial Solar. I’m concerned that could occur here. It would be even worse if they found a way to nullify the current 500ft solar setback. If that happened, the wound caused by massive industrial sprawls, right up to people’s homes, will never heal. Roger Rom lives in the middle of the industrial solar development in Mount Orab. He is surrounded on three sides by panels as close as 30ft to his fence line. Air temperature is 10’ higher at his property line during the summer.

I couldn’t find an Industrial Development Officer claiming zero negative impact after a Data Center was built in their County. Buddy Rizer, Loudon Cty., VA was asked to comment on the concerns residents had about noise, property values and the overwhelming industrialization of green spaces. This was his response: ‘When you’re looking at the need to grow the tax base, we have to have those tradeoffs.’ Nicky Vanderslice, Fayette, NC answered the same question as follows, ‘I’m apologetic that they are being impacted, but also see the benefits of what the company is doing and how they are improving our economy.’ She also made the point that nobody had complained before the development.

Local officials mean only the best and truly believe this development will prove to be an economic boon here in Mason Cty. Owen McNeill has done a fantastic job as Judge Executive over the last few years. I hold him in high regard and that’s from the heart. However, the concern residents have about Data Centers being placed too close to residential communities needs to be addressed in good faith. Large setbacks and meaningful noise control at property lines would help alleviate the communities well founded fears. A ‘good neighbor’ doesn’t throw a punch across a property line and connect with the nose of his neighbor living next door.

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Sarah Beckstrom died for Trump’s optics

When Donald Trump launched his first regime in 2017, I warned he would “get a lot of people killed.” Since nobody seems to be keeping track, I’ll cite The Lancet, a top medical journal, which concluded in 2021 Trump’s “appalling response” to the pandemic “expedited the spread of Covid.” The journal said that roughly 40 percent of the 470,000 deaths on his watch could’ve been avoided had he respected science.

In translation, Trump bears some responsibility for the deaths of 180,000.

But hey, remember what Stalin reputedly said: “The death of one man is a tragedy. The death of millions is a statistic.”

Yes, stats can numb the mind. So let’s talk instead about the tragedy of one – as evidenced by what happened the other day in Washington, where a 20-year-old National Guard woman forfeited her flesh and blood for Trump. She did not die for a noble cause larger than herself; she died for the smallest of men, for a mentally deteriorating narcissist who’s using Guard troops as pawns for purposes of performative spectacle.

Sarah Beckstrom of West Virginia should not have been in Washington, period. But she was, thanks to Trump, and now she’s dead. Her blood is on his hands.

Something like this – a bad actor walking up and firing bullets – was bound to happen. National Guard commanders feared so, in a memo back on Aug. 28. When it became clear Trump was bent on deploying troops to cities he hated, starting with Washington, even though National Guard members were not trained in law enforcement and crime prevention, the commanders warned their presence on the streets would be “a target of opportunity” in a “heightened threat environment,” exposing them to “criminals, violent extremists, issue-motivated groups and lone actors to advance their interests.”

In other words, sitting ducks.

When the city of Washington sued the Trump regime, seeking to remove the troops, it cited the commanders’ memo. But when the Justice Department’s MAGA lawyers saw the memo, they dismissed it as merely “speculative.” Presumably they think otherwise now, unless they’ve been cultivated to believe that picking up street trash and taking selfies with tourists are missions worth the shedding of blood.

Juliet Kayyem, a former assistant secretary at the Department of Homeland Security, says: “The National Guard is stranded somewhere on the battlefield of partisan politics. They’re not ready for this arena, and we should never have asked them to be.” But, of course, “we” never asked them at all. And now we’ve learned, thanks to a Nov. 21 federal court ruling, that Trump’s order was illegal. I

know you’re shocked.

U.S. District Judge Jia Cobb concluded Trump had stolen congressional powers and violated other stuff, but I’ll let Cobb tell it: “At its core, Congress has given the District rights to govern itself. Those rights are infringed upon when defendants (the ruling MAGATs) approve, in excess of their statutory authority, the deployment of National Guard troops to the District.”

In addition, the District “suffers a distinct injury from the presence of out-of-state National Guard units,” because “the Constitution placed the District exclusively under Congress’s authority to prevent individual states from exerting any influence over the nation’s capital.”

But ever since Nov. 21, Sarah Beckstrom and her fellow troopers – including Andrew Wolfe, who’s currently clinging to life – continued to be “targets of opportunity” because Cobb’s ruling has been in limbo thanks to Trump’s appeal. If he’d bowed to the ruling and ordered the troops out, Beckstrom would be alive and Wolfe would be healthy.

Which brings me to a Saturday editorial in The New York Times. This paragraph was astounding: “No one, including the president, is responsible for this tragedy, except for its perpetrator. It should be possible to understand both that Mr. Trump’s use of the National Guard has been outrageous and

that the use did not cause this shooting.”

I won’t cancel my subscription, but I have to ask: Is it really so hard to connect Dot A to Dot B and thus conclude that Beckstrom is dead as a consequence of what The Times itself called Trump’s “outrageous” use of the troops?

Predictably, Trump’s response to the shootings has been even more outrageous – ordering more troops into the District, thus creating even more “targets of opportunity.” This guy, currently saddled with a 36 percent approval rating, confirms something that Groucho Marx once said: “Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedies.”

To me, it’s demonstrably obvious Beckstrom was sacrificed to the optics of MAGA theater, that she’s a tragic casualty of a fake war ginned up by a classic sociopath – someone who’s callous and narcissistic in the extreme, someone devoid of empathy. Am I being too harsh? Check out the exchange Trump had with a reporter the other day.

Q: “Do you plan to attend Sarah’s funeral?”

A: “I haven’t thought about it...I haven’t given it any thought... I love West Virginia. You know, I won West Virginia by one of the biggest margins of any president anywhere.”

I rest my case.

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