

Is the City flushing \$140 million down the drain?

An article **Lancaster Intelligencer / Journal New Era** titled “*City property owners to pay storm water fees beginning this spring*” reports:

“The city plans to make \$140 million in improvements over 25 years...”

“The fees are expected to generate \$2.6 million in revenue this year. That money will be used to plant trees, add drainage islands to parking lots, porous pavement to alleyways and park basketball courts, and vegetative ‘green’ roofs on buildings.”

“Doing so is expected to allow 1 billion gallons of rainwater to soak into the ground that now runs into the city’s curbside storm inlets. During heaving rains, that water overwhelms the city’s wastewater treatment plant and overflows into the river carrying raw sewage along with it.”

When a couple of years ago, Mayor Rick Gray invited **NewsLanc’s** publisher to his office to brief him about roof gardens and porous paving, veteran builder Robert Field raised concerns about the approaches and volunteered to review plans and come up with suggestions. Gray turned a deaf ear.

Field questions how long “*porous pavement to alleyways and park basketball courts*” will last over

a few years as oils and soil from normal use clogs their porous surfaces. The approach is dubious at best.

As for “*vegetative ‘green’ roofs on buildings,*” for how long will they be properly maintained? What does foot traffic do to fragile roofing material?

The constructing of storm sewer in a number of selected locations would relieve the sewer treatment plants. As regulations tightened, and they will, the process would be extended.

In twenty or thirty years, combined storm sewer/sanitary sewer lines would be rare. Storm water would be inexpensively treated by special facilities. There would be no sewer plant surges. And cost of sewer line maintenance would plummet.

But City Planner Randy Patterson refused to meet with Field to discuss this and later other matters.

There is a place for some tree planting and perhaps a few roof top gardens. That is about it. But the real problems will remain yet to be solved.

Let’s put storm water down a proper drain; not taxpayers’ money.

Another thing Rick Gray and Randy Patterson don’t understand

According to Charles Kenny in “**The Upside Of Down**”: “*Harvard’s Ed Glaeser and his colleagues similarly found that US cities with more live performance venues and restaurants saw faster population growth in the last quarter of the twentieth century (although bowling alleys were a growth killer).*” (Emphasis added.)

Alan Ehrenhalt states in “**The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City**”:

“The late twentieth century was the age of poor inner cities and wealthy suburbs; the twenty-first century is emerging as an age of affluent inner neighborhoods and immigrants settling on the

outside. The movement of singles, couples, and empty-nest baby boomers back to the center gathered momentum in the first decade of the new century, stalled in the recession at the end of the decade, and will eventually resume.”

Spending \$15 million in public funds to make the Lancaster Hotel competitive with the Marriott and spending a like amount to turn the former Hess Department Store / Bulova building into a bowling

alley and other uses are just about the worst possible things that the city could do.

The former jeopardizes the city’s heavy investment in the Marriott which it leases to Penn Square Partners. Both block redevelopment of Lancaster Square East.

Lancaster Square East should be razed and re-developed with upscale condos, housing that empty nesters and young professionals desire.

Should Lancaster offer Bike Sharing?

Bike sharing is popular in Washington D. C. and New York City and is now coming to Philadelphia. It makes even more sense for Lancaster with its flat terrain and attractive inner cities and environs. Those who use Amtrak see young and middle age

visitors arriving with folding bicycles. Cycling throughout Lancaster City and County is a splendid way to spend a day or a vacation.

So why not offer bike sharing facilities at the Amtrak station and downtown?

An opportunity to solve Amtrak Station parking deficiency

It is hard to find a place to park at the station after the morning rush hour and sometimes even during.

Who can afford the risk of finding a space? Certainly more parking would generate more passengers.

Furthermore, making commuting easier would attract business, commerce and affluent residents to the city and county.

Fortunately, with the demolition of the original Host Hotel and later Days Inn across the railroad tracks from the train station, there are eleven vacant acres

zoned commercial, a portion of which would be an ideal location for a parking garage. A very short bridge could directly access the garage to the Amtrak station. Easy as apple pie!

Will Mayor Rick Gray and the County Commissioners take notice of this opportunity and work with Amtrak, Manheim Township, and potential developers to include commuter parking as part of the sites’ development plans?

One doesn’t have to spend fortunes to improve our community. But leaders have to have vision, good sense and know how to facilitate worthy projects.

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