

Your letters

It's curtains for an arts czar

April 19, story

Art persists; some leaders should not

We all should be concerned that even in a nice little town like St. Petersburg, we have such small thinkers running things. As a resident, I took great offense upon learning that certain "city officials" took it completely upon themselves to fire Ann Wykell, our city's cultural affairs manager, who, at least from my perspective, worked diligently for 10 years for the public good. Look around. Things have changed here, and for the better!

As for Tish Elston, our "first deputy mayor" (whatever that is), and City Council member Leslie Curran, well, where does one begin. The first seemingly believes that by eliminating the captain ("consolidation"), the boat for the arts will still be steered ("strengthen"). The latter actually believes that "Art is a business. Art is not a luxury." Obviously she relates to art this way because that is her business interest (gallery owner). Where do these wacky people who run our government come from?

The whole manner in which these "officials" fired our manager is not acceptable. If this is the process, and apparently it is in this town, it needs to be changed immediately. If our city is sincere about consolidating operations, I would suggest looking no further than eliminating the office of "first deputy mayor." May we assume that if there is a "first" then there exist a second and third too? Eliminate those also. I've lived in a big city (Portland, Ore.), which continues to thrive without deputy mayor positions, and indeed a City Council having two fewer members than this one. Eliminate those also. Certainly I will not be voting for Curran to return.

Lastly, attention, Leslie Curran: Art is cultural literacy; it reflects our history, our conflicts, achievements, our beauty; it's what we as humans leave behind — there is nothing else, it's priceless and it persists. You have a very limited view of what art is and what it means to humanity. To you, apparently, it's a business, and that is okay for you. However, to most who are knowing (educated), art is creativity of expression, and that goes beyond "luxury." It is significant and should be supported.

Pamella E. Settlegoode, Ph.D.,
St. Petersburg

Baker puts his cuts on the table

April 17, commentary

Cut management, end the lawsuits

Here are a couple of comments that I have regarding these budget cut proposals, and cuts that I see as reasonable and responsible:

1. Cut two deputy mayor positions. We only need one deputy mayor.

2. Cut back on the economic development staff. Do we even need an economic development staff at this time?

3. Calculate monies spent and yet to be spent on lawsuits involving the Tierra Verde annexation. I bet it's a lot in staff time and legal fees already. There is a resounding chorus, including a majority of St. Petersburg citizens, against this move, and efforts at the county and state level are in motion to stop this arrogant takeover. Stop the actions, cut your losses and save money for the taxpayer on this fruitless effort.

4. Calculate the advantages, fiscally speaking, for law enforcement and fire/EMS consolidation county-wide. The savings are seemingly huge, and a responsible mayor and council would embrace and examine these possibilities to save all Pinellas County citizens tax dollars. Many other Pinellas cities are doing so. Why shouldn't St. Petersburg?

These are just a few suggestions, and I hope that the *Times* does due diligence in reporting on the wasteful spending by our city that could be halted in order to save jobs and save that nice surplus. Making intelligent cuts at high levels of management while eliminating high-powered, costly lawsuits that are proceeding against the will of the people and are a drain on our resources — that's where the big money is.

Lorraine Margeson,
St. Petersburg

Baker puts his cuts on the table

April 17, commentary

Here are some cuts that make sense

There are many places to cut the St. Petersburg city budget without crippling the police or fire departments, or the arts/culture sector that is a proven economic engine for the city. The Dali Museum is a perennial draw for people from all over the world, and the recent Durer exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts drew thousands from outside St. Petersburg. Only the Grand

for-profit corporation to build a stadium for the Rays baseball team. And why this project is still up for consideration.

While the people of St. Petersburg are proud of what the Rays have achieved on the field, most feel that this is not where our money should be spent.

Faith Andrews Bedford,
St. Petersburg

Downtown parking

Mainsail marred by parking ticket

It is unfortunate that the collection of property taxes has fallen behind, but does St. Petersburg have to make up the difference by issuing parking tickets? Hundreds attended the Mainsail Art Festival last Sunday, the Rays were playing at home and the Pier was crowded.

Most regular parking around the art festival was blocked off to the public, and I eventually chose a spot at the end of a street not blocking any drives or entrances. I thought perhaps there would be amnesty on a Sunday when St. Petersburg invited thousands to visit the city. But no. The police still had time to issue tickets on their hand-held computers.

What do I do now? Pay it and never visit St. Petersburg again? Or do I ignore it and let them spend more money to collect the 35 bucks?
Alvan Hill, Mishawaka, Ind.

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So much noise over very little

Are you kidding? If I have a noise pollution problem with my neighbor's vehicle, I can send in his plate number and the police — who, evidently in St. Petersburg, have nothing better to do — will send my neighbor a dunning letter? If I'm really ticked at said neighbor and make multiple complaints, will they come out and physically harass him?

I don't live in Lakewood Estates, but it seems that we have one woman there with too much time on her hands, and a sense of entitlement.

And as for the City Council, any member who voted for this nonsense — with all of the real problems facing St. Petersburg — should be voted out of office.

Walter Staggs, St. Petersburg

Prix comes close to giving us the international exposure we get from our arts sector.

How about reducing the number of deputy mayors? How about consolidating police and fire within the county? How about getting a financial manager who pays attention to how the city is investing its money? The \$15 million he lost us with risky investments would have balanced the budget for the next two years.

And, while we're at it, how about dropping the Tierra Verde annexation, before we waste thousands of dollars on staff time and legal battles against citizens, the county and the state?

Hal Freedman, St. Petersburg

Baker puts his cuts on the table

April 17, commentary

Budget must focus on residents' needs

St. Petersburg Mayor Rick Baker has recently outlined his proposed budget cuts. Once again, our police and firefighters are being targeted. The last series of cuts sliced library hours, discontinued after-school programs and whittled away at senior and social service needs. Although a countywide consolidation of police and emergency services might better serve the residents of St. Petersburg and Pinellas while saving much-needed funds for social services, the budget discussions must focus on the needs of the citizens.

Which is why, in view of the cuts our city continues to consider and has already made in areas so important to the quality of life in St. Petersburg, one wonders how the City Council could ever have considered giving millions of taxpayer dollars and public land to a