



The Ross Retort

by Lisa Ross

FALLING PREY TO THE MASTER PLAN ABUSE SYNDROME

I was looking for a new home last week in some of our area's nicest master planned communities when suddenly it occurred to me that I had fallen prey to the Master Plan Abuse syndrome (MPA).

MPA is a cyclical syndrome of self-victimization where a person not only buys one home in a San Diego Master Planned community, but after having already watched helplessly as the class-A "village" plan that hung seductively in that sales office of yore crumbled into strip malls, the home seeker goes right on out and buys in another one of these upscale developments, thinking that "this time it will be different."

Psychologists tell us that the cycle of abuse contains features the recovery movement calls denial and enabling, and that down home Freudians simply call masochism and repetition compulsion. Marveling at the gourmet Viking stoves, granite counters and two potty master bedrooms, I was about to hand over the Qualcomm stock. I had definite signs.

But, the friendly folks who live in Sorrento Hills AKA Torrey Hills Master Planned Community, decided to conduct an "intervention" with me (confronting the compulsive behavior) by peppering me with email for days after the San Diego City Council turned their "planned" neighborhood into a home for the biggest gas station, convenience store and carwash yet devised by humans.

I must admit that during the last campaign for local office, I pulled these vulnerable people into my world of denial by uttering those six little words familiar to anyone who has lived through an abusive relationship, "this time it will be different."

It would be different if they worked hard to elect the right person to represent them on the City Council, someone who really cared about neighborhoods and would hover over community plans like a mother hen. OK, I've been there, done that one too many times.

But, I have only Councilman Brian Maienschein, who represents communities along I-15, to blame for enabling this denial behavior. Mr. Maienschein, who in his first six months in office, has demonstrated an uncommon concern for neighborhoods and for staying true to his word, like being the lone vote against the gas station project because the community clearly did not want it.

And that's because he said he would do that when he campaigned for office. In some psychology circles that is called reinforcement of self-defeating behavior—the more Maienschein defends communities and neighborhoods, the more hope I harbor that something akin to the Mayoral fantasy (AKA delusion) about a City of Villages might actually happen, somewhere.

The rest of the City Council conducted an intervention of their own during the Council hearing on the Chevron gas station, forcefully confronting the neighbors on their denial systems by making the case that the Torrey Hills community plan allowed this mega-station along with a variety of uses euphemistically called "neighborhood commercial."

Homeowners should have known what they were possibly in store for, or worse. For example, the healthy resident, when presented with the planning department designation NC (neighborhood commercial), would free associate something in the K's, like in K-Mart or Circle K, not in the S's, like in Starbucks or Sbicca, a clear indication of a deeply entrenched delusional system.

Like the woman working on her third marriage who says "I was sure that this one was different" after failing to conduct the most basic background check on the guy's credit history, grade point average and sperm count, we all deserve what our neuroses get us.

Well, smell the roses, turn on the lights, and let's get our damaged Self's into an MPA recovery group or psychoanalysis, whatever comes easiest or cheapest, because sans going to law school to become a land use expert, the only way out of this abusive cycle is to get out. Not so easy—ask Hillary Clinton.

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