

# OPINION

## Letters to the Editor

### Vacuumed by the wealthy

**Editor:**  
Unless you've been living under a rock for the last 30 years, it should be quite apparent that part of the wealth that has been stolen from the people of this country and sucked up into the greedy bellies of the very wealthy is land, not just money ("Cowan Plan before Board," Oct. 31).

It's like an infection of greed has taken over the body of our country. All the most beautiful places, all the money, all the resources, it's all being vacuumed up by the very wealthy. Is this what we want for Alameda, too? Shall we just hand over our assets and submit, like good little subjects?

— Jaan Carter

### Scouts give thanks

**Editor:**  
I would like to thank Safeway on Island Drive and the Harbor Bay Community for the support they showed Cub Scout Pack 1076 for the past month as the boys learned salesmanship during their annual popcorn fundraiser. I am overwhelmed at the generosity people shown our young scouts, not only monetarily but, more importantly, in kindness.

The power of kindness is extraordinary and leaves marks on its recipients. By being friendly, approachable and open to our scouts, I saw an increase in their courage, self-esteem and self-worth. I watched young boys ranging from Tiger (first grade) to Webelos (fifth grade) step out of their comfort zones as they learned salesmanship, leadership, teamwork, perseverance, patience, how to overcome frustration and righteous pride in their achievements.

Additionally, the sales helped some of our scouts learn business skills as they counted and tallied inventory, and learned basic accounting. This experience would not have been the same without the loving support of the community. On behalf of Pack 1076 I once again thank the community for supporting and nurturing the growth of our young scouts.

— Pepper Hoyt, Pack 1076

### Change not welcome

**Editor:**  
The 35th annual arts-and-craft show Alameda Holiday Boutique was held at the

Veterans Memorial Building, on Nov. 1 and 2. Proceeds benefited the Leisure Club, a recreation program for developmentally disabled teens and adults sponsored by the Alameda Recreation and Parks Department. Money is also collected to benefit Meals on Wheels and Friendly Visitors. This show was coordinated by volunteers and free to the public.

Prior to the show opening on Friday morning, city workers changed the parking meters from 2-hour parking to 10-minute parking in front of the Veterans building and up and down Central Avenue between Oak and Walnut streets on both sides of the street.

Customers were not aware of this as they parked their cars. Dropping the elderly or small children, or supplies to sell at the show took time to complete. Then when you feed the meter and find that it only takes one quarter for 10 minutes, it is pointless to enter the show. There were no signs on the meters advising the public of the 10-minute restriction.

This hometown community event takes place just once a year. The parking change certainly was a turn off to customers who came to browse the arts and crafts, eat, meet friends, shop and possibly make donations. We are encouraged to shop locally and this event featured homemade items and food, but if they are limited to 10-minute parking, what is the point?

I feel the city should support functions that are in Alameda, not deter people from them. I would really like an answer as to what was the rationale behind this "random" parking-meter change.

— Joanne Broadbent

### Full disclosure, please

**Editor:**  
Letter writers and those who submit editorials in favor of the current Harbor Bay land swap should immediately and ethically identify themselves if they are or have been part-time, full-time employees or have or will be reimbursed or remunerated in any way by Ron Cowan or any of his reported properties and businesses.

This includes the Harbor Bay Club and Harbor Bay Realty. This is especially important when writers support the 80 homes at the site of today's Harbor Bay Club.

People who might be affiliated with Cowan or his properties and businesses in our city should also fully disclose any ties before speaking at any public meetings.

These disclosures will help level the playing field.

— Mike Lano

### Let's make the best of it

**Editor:**  
As a sophomore in high school, I have attended the Alameda Community Learning Center (ACL) for what will be five years this July. I have always loved my school, inside and out, faithfully sticking with it this year as it relocated to the Wood Middle School campus.

This transition was difficult for all of us; Encinal High School was working hard to recreate our school in a new place, and Wood Middle School had new neighbors to accommodate. This has been a struggle for everyone, as all new things are, but I believe that our effort is making the most of what we have been given.

Recently my hopes for the smooth coexistence of ACLC and Wood have been slightly dampened. In terms of administration, the two schools have cooperated nicely. Agreements were made in early September giving designated times for the use of the gym for both schools and setting up boundaries for students of each school.

The field behind the schools is shared every day at lunch giving opportunities for middle school interaction while ACLC students take the chance to go off campus. From my observations, everything had been going very well.

A couple weeks ago, however, I was driving home with my friend from rowing practice in Oakland and we noticed a sign before entering the tube from the Oakland side. The sign read "ACLC out of Wood." The message was made clear, on another sign I found posted in Alameda. Along with the same words from before, it read "Get rid of the greed."

After a while I stopped seeing signs, but last week the message "Go Home ACLC," with added profanity, was found on one of the ACLC portables. Honestly enough, it just broke my heart.

I don't wish to target anyone or complain. As a member of the ACLC governing board, I can assure you that our school's purpose has never been to intrude on other schools or anything of the sort. We are a school, and we are here to teach our learners, nothing more.

Furthermore, the school's move was in no way a direct attack at Wood Middle School as the signs have implied. Encinal High School had a plan for its Junior Jets and the school board saw fit to relocate us to another campus to make room.

What I am recommending is that we make the best of the situation, put our differences aside and strive for a happy and safe environment on Grand Street.

— Sophia Moore

### Park plan error corrected

**Editor:**  
I've been leading a community effort to guide the Recreation and Park Department's planning for the Jean Sweeney Open Space in regard to the trails and proposed biking features. There is one important error in the city's draft plan that I wanted to correct. The designer has incorrectly labeled the pump track as a "BMX Bike Park."

In fact, this facility will not be a BMX park, rather it is intended to be a pump track.

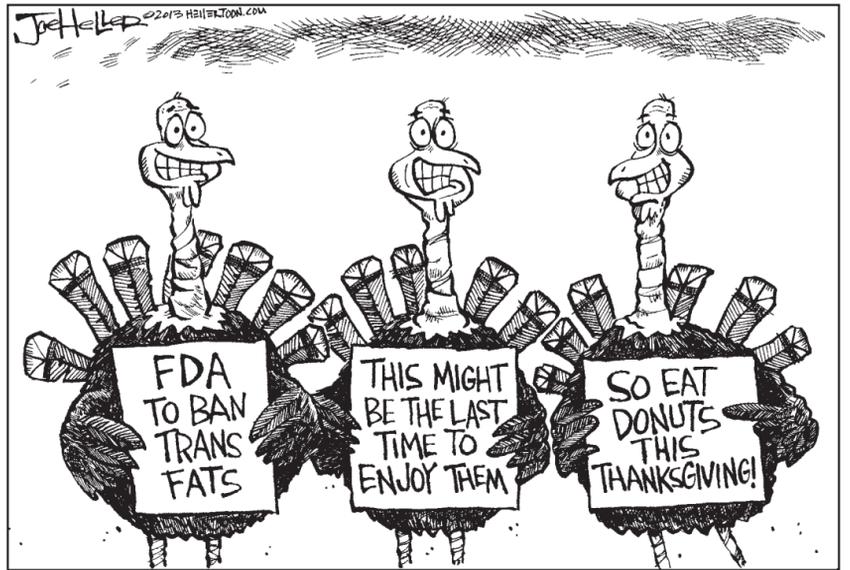
A pump track is a small-scale closed course (less than 15,000 square feet in size) that uses "rollers" (trail undulations) and "berms" (banked turns) to provide places for people of all ages to practice and learn advanced biking skills in a safe environment.

A pump track is not a racing course and does not include jumps. Most pump tracks include a course for more advanced riders ages 5 and older, along with a small beginner course suitable for kids ages 2 to 5.

— Aaron Thies

The Alameda Sun received a remarkable number of letters regarding recent events at the Alameda Animal Shelter. The letters continue on the next two pages.

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Joe Heller

## How Well Does the City Mind the Store?

Elizabeth Warmerdam

Last week, the city released its unaudited fourth quarter financial report for fiscal year 2012/13 on all city funds. I thought I'd share the numbers.

Over the past year, staff projected the city to be in the red. We anticipated that we would take in approximately \$71.1 million from July 1, 2012, until June 30, but spend \$72.4 million over that same period — a gap of \$1.3 million. As it turns out, we brought in \$71.9 million (\$800,000 more than we expected) and spent \$71.4 million (\$1 million less than expected).

On a percentage basis, this is not so significant. But when we are asked to maintain critical services with fewer resources, this is really good news. It means we are being more creative and efficient and strictly controlling expenses on things like staffing and overtime.

With the economy stumbling out of recession and home prices beginning to rebound, we are cautiously optimistic. But, we recognize these incremental wins are not enough. Our financial strength is not determined from one budget year to the next.

### Point

A better objective measure of financial health is the city's bond rating. You might have recently read that our general obligation bond ratings went up a notch from AA to AA+. In prior years, the City Council adopted a reserve policy of at least 20 percent of the city's annual expenditures.

Even in this difficult economic climate, we've achieved this goal. Now, together with an improving Bay Area economy, the rating agency Standard and Poor's cited the city's strong financial management as a key factor in increasing the city's bond ratings. No other city in Alameda County has a higher rating.

So, if you subscribe to the theory that good begets good, you'll appreciate that with the better bond rating, and a well-timed offering, the city was able to save nearly \$2 million with the refinancing of two of its previous bond issues. This allows us to fund the Emergency Operation Center at the center of the Island. That essential facility was put on hold with the failure of Measure C in 2012.

Not only did the AA+ rating save taxpayer dollars, it will lower the cost of borrowing in the future to help with rebuilding the infrastructure at the Alameda Point. With an estimated price tag of close to \$600 million, every bit counts.

Finally, for those that continue to monitor our looming Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) liability and other labor issues, the city continues to make progress. As noted in the past, our employees continue to share in the costs of both their retirement (aka PERS) and the increase in the cost of medical premiums. We have also begun informal talks with our safety unions regarding ways in which we can jointly address the OPEB liability. With labor being more than 70 percent of our operating costs, similar to many businesses, there's no question that these discussions are critical.

So, how well do you think are we minding the store? Tell us what you think and what matters to you at [manager@alamedaca.gov](mailto:manager@alamedaca.gov). If there is an area that you are particularly concerned about, let us know.

Elizabeth Warmerdam is an assistant city manager

## Hop on Alameda's Merry Go Round

Enjoy the 'windfall' while you can

Robert Sullwold

Remember how, back in July, City Council agreed to establish a "trust fund" to begin paying down the city's unfunded liability for retiree health benefits but couldn't figure out where to get money to put into the trust?

"We just can't overnight do this trust fund and fund it adequately," Vice Mayor Marilyn Ezzy Ashcraft said at the time. "We just can't. But anything we put in is going to help and the more the better. So when we find these windfalls, if that's the correct term, I just would really encourage thinking of putting them there and helping them grow that trust fund."

Now, thanks to the superior management skills of city staff, the first of the "windfalls" the vice mayor was hoping for appears to have materialized.

According to the above commentary by Assistant City Manager Liz Warmerdam and a report presented to council on Nov. 5, staff managed to turn an expected \$1.3 million loss for fiscal year 2012-13 into a \$500,000 profit — the difference between \$71.9 million in revenues and \$71.4 million in expenses. Taking in more money than you spent when you expected to do just the opposite indeed could be considered a "windfall," however the vice mayor defines the term.

Following Ashcraft's admonition, the \$500,000 can go right into the trust fund (which, we assume, staff already has established).

True, even a half a million may not make much of a dent in an unfunded liability that had reached \$86.4 million by January 2011 and is continuing to rise. ("Unfunded liability" refers to the difference between what it will cost the city to provide retiree health benefits in the future and what it has set aside

to pay for them — which, in Alameda's case, is zero). But Finance Director Fred Marsh told council last July that contributing just \$100,000 to the trust fund would be a "good starting point." It turns out we can do five times better.

Time to make out the first deposit slip! Maybe we can even have a ceremony at City Hall at which the City Manager John Russo hands the mayor (or the vice mayor) one of those oversized checks.

There's just one problem: Whether they realize it or not, City Council already has agreed to devote the profit for fiscal year 2012-13 to covering the shortfall budgeted for the following two years.

Go back to June when staff presented the fiscal year 2013-14 and fiscal year 2014-15 budgets to council. At that time, with only a few weeks left in the current fiscal year, staff knew that fiscal year 2012-13 results would beat the budget, and the city would make a profit rather than incur a loss. So staff took the difference between the estimated profit and the budgeted loss, called it "projected budget savings," and "carried it over" to the next two years.

The "carryover" then was used to camouflage two years' worth of deficit spending. Expenses are budgeted to exceed revenues by \$700,000 in fiscal year 2013-14 and by \$1.8 million in fiscal year 2014-15 — a total of \$2.5 million. But the budget prepared by staff treats the "budget carryover from fiscal year 2012-13" as if it were additional revenue, so the bottom line does not show a deficit in either year. Only through such an artifice were the mayor and city manager once again able to proclaim that they had "balanced" the budget.

But no one should be fooled. In reality, this method is nothing more than using this year's gain to cover

### Counterpoint

**The "carryover" then was used to camouflage two years worth of deficit spending.**

the next two years' losses. The money to make up the shortfalls will come right out of reserves. And the reserve balance at the end of fiscal year 2014-15 will be almost exactly the same as the balance originally budgeted for the end of fiscal year 2012-13.

That isn't all. When staff prepared the fiscal year 2013-14 and 2014-5 budgets, it assumed that the "carryover" from fiscal year 2012-13 would consist of \$1.4 million in realized profit and \$1.1 million

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### Our Letters Policy

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Letters to the Editor are welcome from the community. Letters must include a name and phone number for verification purposes. Unsigned letters will not be printed.

Letters are subject to editing for length, clarification and legal considerations. Please try to limit letters to 250 words.

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