

Density and Civility

Letter To The Editor – Orlando Sentinel

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The air in Winter Park City Hall was stale, the room was hot, and tony Winter Park lost a part of its civility on Tuesday night. Bare-knuckled fisticuffs broke out over increased density, urbanization, and land speculation in Florida's premier urban village. You would have thought this was 1895, not 2005! The mutual beating inflicted upon two grown men was only the physical manifestation of a City clinging to the past, enjoying the bounty of the present, but afraid of what the future might bear. "We are becoming another downtown Orange Avenue in Orlando," exclaimed one beautifully coiffured villager.

This matter of density in the "City of Culture and Heritage" came to hockey game blows and the Police, not the referees, had to be called in to separate the combatants and assess the blame. Who was to blame? I am afraid we all are.

The Planning and Zoning Board needs to run tighter meetings. The speakers need to show respect for City staff, to the volunteer Planning and Zoning Board members, and to those whose who hold views other than their own. Applause and cheers are for the theater, not the chambers of local government. Citizens need to be educated, informed, and study; not shout about the issues. We all need to learn to listen to others, respect their views, but firmly agree to disagree. As citizens, we need to engage the civic process, be informed, show up and be counted, not only on election day, not only before the planning and zoning hearings, but for parks and recreation meetings and for schools' construction charettes and transportation design meetings. We need civic engagement not civic enragement!