



An Open Letter to New Planning Commissioner Appointees, Tony Baker and Paul Tanner

Dear Mr. Baker and Mr. Tanner,

We just read an email that was sent to the Planning Commissioners and the Elbert County Board of County Commissioners that essentially was a “hit piece” on sitting Planning Commissioner Rick Brown. A sample of your complaint is as follows, “...*there were a few occasions at the Planning Commission Meeting the other night where the interactions between Mr. Brown and Ms. Fenner were extremely tense, and one in particular where Mr. Brown responded to Ms. Fenner with such great disdain that I was actually embarrassed.*” In our opinion, this email and your characterization of that particular exchange is ludicrous and exaggerated. We base our opinion on the fact that we have attended countless meetings on this issue and neither of you were there to experience the incompetent actions of CDS Director Kyle Fenner. For Mr. Brown, a retired, extremely accomplished attorney, to point out that Ms. Fenner does not understand the legality of her actions is well within his rights. He used no inappropriate language, did not raise his voice, and addressed her by name. This is not disdain. The correct term is disagreement. It was factual in nature.

By your own admission over the course of the aforementioned meeting, you are new to this procedure. You have not spent the hundreds of hours that Mr. Brown and other members of the commission (as part of the editing committee or as a sitting Commissioner) have regarding this extremely tedious and frustrating issue. That said, while you are entitled to your opinion, you must understand that to many in attendance your words highlight the shortsightedness of your participation and preparedness. We are quick to point out that being on a commission for ten hours before taking a vote on an extremely contentious and complicated set of regulations erodes our confidence in your ability to lead on this important body. Quite frankly, the course for the new appointees that evening should have been recusal given their inexperience. Again, that is our opinion, and we are certain that you must disagree with us on this point or you would not have voted.

There is an historical value to Planning Commissions. Paramount to the committee is the notion that the representatives to the commission reflect the community from which they reside and not the views of the County Commissioner who appointed them. It may be that you feel you are doing just that, but clearly there is a bipartisan group in the community at large that wants best industry practices explicit to the oil and gas regulations. The more our BOCC and its Planning Commission try to frame this as an argument that is being waged by “whackadoodles” on the left, the less credibility you have.

Nobody is arguing that fracking is coming. It is. Let’s just do it safely, and that will require involving the community members who are directly impacted by oil and gas development. To characterize people who have been exercising their civic duty as “extremists” betrays the facts. The group that has chosen to regularly attend these meetings is comprised of Republicans, Democrats, Independents, several engineers, lawyers, scientists and educators, concerned property owners and parents. They leave work early and make sacrifices to attend. They aren’t suggesting that we “kick the can down the road” as two attendees so *eloquently* stated. They are however, standing up for their rights.

Finally, we believe you must examine the fact that anybody, including yourselves, may at some point in the future find yourself at odds with one or more of the Elbert County Commissioners. The current board's behavior suggests that they will not hesitate to trump up your genuine concern as a sign of obstructionism. But, at some point, you will most likely be framed, slandered and dismissed for standing up for your beliefs.

Two previous heads of the Planning Commission whose service represented nearly a quarter of a century experience have been run off. Paul Crisan probably has grounds for yet another lawsuit against the county as a result. One Planning Commission member was recently non-renewed for unexplained reasons although some believe his criticism of Ms. Fenner was a factor. A quick review of all of Elbert County employees or appointees suggests that this is a county-wide problem. If you do not align yourself with two of our sitting County Commissioners, you are not going to be around for very long. If that behavior does not concern you, then perhaps you have just disclosed the reason you were considered for appointments as Planning Commissioners.

Robert Thomasson
Tony Corrado