

To The editors

Aug. 15

The enclosed article is  
by an 85 year old  
woman who writes for  
The Valley Times-Herald  
in California.

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I know [redacted] because  
I was teaching a class on  
"Writing Stories for Your  
Grandchildren" when [redacted]  
realized she had always wanted  
to write for a news column  
and went to her Town newspaper.

'The rest is history'. She  
gets letters and phone calls  
for her wonderful philosophy,  
history, + perspective. Best!  
[redacted]



# Cable keeps 'good' citizen informed

**T**uesdays, our cable service airs the City Council meetings. On alternating Mondays, it carries the proceedings of our Planning Commission. Although I'm not a woman who believes that all — or even many — modern innovations are an unallowed benefit to mankind in general or me in particular, I'm a great fan of these programs.

Cable makes it easy for me to be the sort of citizen Jefferson wanted — fully aware of the issues, and well informed about how elected officials and the people appointed to boards and commissions perform in office. It has never been so convenient for an ordinary citizen like me to learn what decisions are being made that directly affect my life and why they are being made in *this* way instead of *that*. All it costs me is the monthly fee for cable service and the time I invest.

The Planning Commission struggles with problems public and private, trying to balance the legal with the permissible. When they are not working to find solutions to conflicts between neighbors, hearing citizen comment on plans for development, and deciding whether and individual's application for a use permit falls within the parameters of existing zoning laws, they must struggle with long range issues such as the parks; streets, sewer lines, and housing projects and commercial development that makes a city livable.

The Mayor and City Council struggle from week to week to solve civic problems within the boundaries of the existing local codes, county, state and federal laws and mandates and whatever budgetary possibilities may be available. Not easy! They face enormous difficulties in arriving at fair or even possible solutions to the needs of the city while out fiscal situation worsens. "The Economy" is not *out there* — it is *here* and the difficulties will be around for the foreseeable future.

Recent decisions by the state legislature to divert part of our local property taxes to state coffers, the federal decision to close Mare Island, and increases in out state unemployment



rate makes every local problem that much worse. City government is forced with a megaversion of the dilemma facing an unemployed wage-earner who must somehow care for a family with unemployment checks and mirrors.

The strive diligently to deal with the problems of providing city services, do what they can to make Vallejo a livable town, and hear citizen concerns. For this last, they provide an agenda item called the Open Forum. This is 15 minutes at the beginning of every meeting. Citizens can address the council on any item over which it has jurisdiction. Five minutes are allotted to those who are spokespersons for groups, three minutes to others. A signal light at the end of the podium helps keep track of the time. Though many speakers prepare well and abide by the time limit, a disheartening number ignore the expiration signal and continue with their presentation. A small transgression, perhaps, but a violation of the rights of every speaker who is to follow. I'm amazed that so many folks who go to the council to uphold their rights find it so easy to deprive fellow citizens of their right to be heard.

When friends criticize city government, I suggest watching the council meetings. I'm no longer surprised at the answer I usually get. "Oh, I tried that. It was boring. It takes so long and I miss my favorite programs." So far, I haven't answered, "You'll just have to be satisfied with not understanding it, then," but I suspect that day is coming. Week after week, staff presents

(See [redacted] C2)

[redacted]  
(From C1)

its finding, showing charts, diagrams and photos that illustrate the situations being considered. These help me appreciate why easy solutions are not to be found or good ones arrived at quickly. I sometimes drive past a site that has been discussed and because I'm aware of the informa-

tion presented, once I've seen the site I know why it takes so long to try to solve a conflict in a way that won't disappoint too many affected citizens.

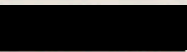
Folks, I've lived where there were no services. We buried our garbage to keep the cougars out of it, prayed that the mountains

wouldn't catch on fire, tried to forget how convenient it was to have water piped into the house, put up with an outhouse, and saw the game warden more than the county sheriff. The school was 10 miles away, and the nearest hospital 50 miles distant, over roads that were little more than two muddy ruts on a mountainside. I cherish the fact that I've got police and fire protection, water and sewer service, animal control and garbage pickup, medical services, schools for my great-grandkids and libraries, stores, and supermarkets I can get to over paved roads. I like Vallejo better.

Watching the City Council every week lets me see their dedication to meeting my needs. When I punch my ballot beside a name or an issue, I know (thanks to cable) who and what I'm voting for. So, network TV can get along without for a few hours a week. It could be worse. *Much worse.*

□ [redacted] is a freelance writer living in Vallejo. Her weekly columns in the Vallejo seniors section give a woman's perspective on growing older.





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