

1-22-10 Make Those Donations Count

I was recently cornered at a party by an architect venting about the issue of bedroom count and septic systems in connection with building permits. I tried to explain that her argument was really with DEP and not with local health agents charged with enforcing those environmental codes. We chatted, sort of, and I tried to give examples of ways in which I could work with floor plans and I attempted to explain the purpose behind the bedroom count, namely to discover the human-use needing to be served by the septic system, in order to protect the environment. It seemed to me that my words fell on deaf ears. That was okay. Maybe I did not sufficiently defend my position because I was distracted. My thoughts were with the people of Haiti who needed water and sanitation and quick and safe communal burials. I was thinking, “We are so fortunate. We have this luxury of talking about bedroom count matching the capacity of the onsite sewer treatment while there are people on this earth who are born into a system of poverty, overcrowding and in shacks with no sewer system at all.”

My son in law, a state trooper, saw me and later asked, “That happens to you, too? People think you are always at work and always available for comment?” I ordinarily don’t mind. Really. I love my job and I’m happy to clear up misunderstandings or answer any questions I can but I’m not to blame for all the problems of the world and I’d much rather focus on the positive and get something accomplished.

That’s how I felt as a teenager, also. One of my few accomplishments was being the organizer of the first walk-a-thon for Weymouth. I was in high school, a long, long time ago and I guess I had a lot of energy. I met boards of selectmen, politicians and school committees. I asked people to help and they did. Local companies donated stamps, paper and rubbish barrels. People delivered, by hand, a notice to every household along the twenty five mile route, informing them of the event. The National Guard drove around and picked up weary people needing a ride. We raised over \$30,000 in one day for an overseas project bringing potable water to a Malaysian community and to a local school for mentally challenged children.

We did a good thing that day in May several decades ago and, as most important events in our lives, there were lessons learned. Along with learning that people could consolidate their efforts so that every little bit did, indeed, help, I also learned that some people cannot be trusted with cash and that it gets misplaced real easily. After the walk I heard stories, that despite all my efforts for a detailed system of checks and balances to account for every cent donated, some people found loopholes and pocketed the cash themselves. Ever since then, I have felt strongly about donations being traceable. As tempting as it may be to toss some cash into a jar labeled “Haiti Relief Fund”, please take a few minutes to choose your organization and to give them a check. One person might choose Red Cross and another might choose Salvation Army. You can

even give to Habitat for Humanity. Did you know they had an office right in Haiti that was demolished with the earthquake? Fortunately, none of their fifty or so staff were hurt and they are now relocated.

There is so much to accomplish before anyone can have any semblance of normalcy there. After the dead are buried and the wounded are treated and people relocated and the rubble is cleared and the stench is gone, the place will be rebuilt. And when it is, it won't be re-built as it was. I can't imagine that this would be allowed. Potable water, sanitation and sewerage for everyone will be at the top of the list. I hope all the donations arrive and are put to use where they are needed most and I hope the engineers and architects don't argue with the health agents.

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for the Town of Halifax, MA. Do you have a suggestion for helping the people in Haiti? You can contact her at 781 293 6768 or cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us