

*Since the beginning, Lowcountry Weekly's wonderful Editor, Margaret Evans, has given this writer carte blanche. That's why this column is called "Standpoint". It contains my opinions and my analysis. This one is an unabashedly proud endorsement of Billy Keyserling for the Mayoralty of Beaufort.*



*This does not mean his opponents are without merit and great value. It is about why I think Beaufort needs Billy K. Two things you all should know: 1) I consider Billy a personal friend so I am biased and 2) I am a sitting member of the Board of the Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce. All views expressed are my own. □*

A succinctly perfect Japanese proverb says: *"Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare."*

Having lived in Bluffton from the beginning of 2000 until two years ago, I have witnessed the nightmare. Having lived in Beaufort for the past two years, I have begun to understand the danger of powerful, individual daydreams masquerading as a common vision.

Billy Keyserling has taken some recent bashing about supposedly being against "planning," but if you listen to what he says, it's simple: Planning should lead to the fulfillment of a vision. In the business world, that's a standard. There's no good Strategic Plan anywhere that is not in the service of a broader and grander vision and the good sense Billy makes is to remind us that piecemeal planning leads to piecemeal development and almost assures that nothing is tied together. It is not hard to see the result of this in Beaufort.

While one of the most appealing downtowns in the South languishes economically, cookie-cutter strip mall buildings and hotels are assembled under the banner of Beaufort Town Center. It isn't inherently bad for there to be hotels and new businesses in convenient locations, but where's the common or shared vision? Why are we recreating an urban environment all the way up Boundary Street but paying little or no attention to the gateway to the true and treasured historic center of Beaufort?

Given the examples of what happened around Bluffton (parts of which look more like suburban New Jersey than the Carolina Lowcountry) and is now happening in Okatie and Hardeeville, do we give ourselves the opportunity, maybe the last opportunity to do it right, here?

It all depends on us and the choices we make. If you look around America at towns that got it right, their vision was not delivered to them, top down, by mayor/developer alliances. It was created from the neighborhood level upwards and outwards. In Billy K's words, "you start with a neighborhood's vision and you integrate that with surrounding neighborhoods' and peoples' visions. It's the process of getting more people to participate in their future. It's collective visioning".

Billy then provides a stark juxtaposition to that idea with a reference to the appointed 17-member advisory committee for the Beaufort Comprehensive Plan (State Law mandates that the Comprehensive Plan must be reviewed every five years and updated every ten) and

wonders why none of the 17 members is an African American, a worker, a housewife or househusband, or a retiree?

Far from being against planning, Billy Keyserling simply believes the process can work much better with the engagement of the people who live and work here; the people who have their roots here; the people who are newcomers here; the people who are still to come.

The daily newspaper is full of excellent letters telling you and me why each writer's preferred candidate is the right choice. These are just a few reasons I believe Billy Keyserling is the best choice: He is a remarkably intelligent man and has a broadly engaging personality. His knowledge and understanding of Beaufort and our region is enormous. His negotiating skills are legendary and his energy is boundless.

It all combines into one formidable characteristic and that is what's called "leadership". It takes a leader to understand that our future success is as much dependent on our engagement in the processes that affect our lives as it is on the person we elect to lead us into that future. That's the kind of partnership and two-way street Billy Keyserling envisages. Wouldn't that be a refreshing change?