



June 29, 2012

You are cordially invited to our **Berkeley Lake July 4th Celebration** on next Wednesday. Decorate your cars, dogs, kids, and selves and join the parade which will form up at the elementary school at 10:45 AM. Then bring a picnic or partake of the lunch prepared by BLHA volunteers. They will be selling hamburgers, hotdogs & potato chips about noon as the parade concludes; and we appreciate their doing this for everybody. Tevis Stine, everybody's favorite big kid, will be leading the little kids in competitive watermelon eating, tossing water balloons, and other games. The city has rented the Chapel for this special event and purchased the prizes for the kids. Please join us as we celebrate our country and our community. I always think Berkeley Lake does July 4th as well or better than anybody. INSERT PICTURE

July 4th always makes me grateful to be a citizen in this blessed place, and I've been doing some thinking about what this means. The whole balance of citizen rights and responsibility is always of significant importance, and that's apparent, of course, in our little microcosm. As an example, I was distressed this week to read on the Nextdoor Berkeley Lake website a lot of anger and destructive criticism. One citizen was understandably upset that having built a lovely stone mailbox, the city ordinance required him to replace it with the required "stake and arm" type. I think we've all about had it with the vandals who destroy mailboxes, but I think some of that anger rolled over unfairly onto some folks who work hard for our city. Opinions were offered publicly that, "Maybe when you get a big city hall you have to fill it with people and regulations," and "Most at city hall are pretty close to worthless." So to counter that I offer here some facts for your consideration.

1. The stake and arm mailbox requirement was not created since we have a big city hall. It was created in 1995 when Rick Schmidt was mayor by council members Leslie Cardin, Bernie Cohen, Marion McDugald, Walter Rehm, and Charlie Robson. Charlie was the only one who voted against it. Then in 2008 when I was mayor, Walter Anderson, Debbie Guthrie, Tom Kitchens, Frank Lombardi, and Rebecca Spitler voted unanimously to add to our "stake and arm" requirement the federal standards containing design and material specifications that are based on actual crash test results. As I recall

the concern was that since the feds and the state had both separately studied and adopted these standards they might have some value; and that the city might encounter liability issues if we're the only ones around without commonly accepted standards. My point here is simply that a lot of conscientious people over many years have studied this and made decisions they thought best.

2. Riding around and looking at mailboxes takes more time than typing "Mailboxes" into our website's search which would instantly have clarified, "*It is forbidden to erect permanent obstructions such as masonry mailboxes or columns in the public right of way. See [Chapter 70](#) for more information.*" If you see an existing mailbox it may be misleading because the city's been here for 56 years. That's a lot of ordinance changes and we usually grandfather in the old things. I have said many times in *Mayor's Messages*, please don't make any changes on your property without checking city ordinances or calling city hall first. I'm saying it again now and hoping it helps to avoid this kind of hassle for everybody going forward.
3. Citizen choices are not limited to ugly mailboxes. There are some available stake and arm ones that are both very attractive and vandal resistant.
4. **Lastly and most importantly, the folks at city hall have been through hell and high water in the last few years and accomplished more than any reasonable person would ever have thought possible. The city has won battles over the dam, won major money from FEMA and GEMA, brought in a lovely new residential subdivision and more than 150 businesses, countered efforts to take those annexations away, and lowered your taxes. They continue to do all this with courtesy, competence, and far less compensation than they would receive in comparable positions with other cities. So before anyone condemns them as "worthless," please ask yourself: If you had their jobs, could you keep everybody around here any happier than they do? I don't think so.**

I don't have any personal preference regarding city mailboxes. If you do, or if you have a concern about *any* other issue, I urge you to do your homework and present a constructive suggestion to one of your council members or staff. Chances are you'll find that idea has already been considered and found to have all kinds of surprising complexities. If you think you could catch vandals who ride through the city bashing mailboxes and are gone in minutes, we'd all love to hear it. Be prepared to consider the costs and how much you want to raise taxes for everybody. And if you appreciate what your city staff has done for us all, find an opportunity to thank them. It might counteract some of the negativity that is more hurtful than people think. Suggestions and constructive criticism are always welcome and could be very helpful. Good citizenship requires it.

I wish you all a very happy Independence Day. See you Wednesday.

Lis D. Salter