

I am finally able to write something about Oakwood.

I have been struggling to come to grips with the loss of the referendum which will lead to the destruction of the last large greenspace in our community; this generation will leave no Metropark.

If you only want to hear positive and comfortable things about our community, it is best if you stop reading now. I want to tell you the truth as I see it.

First Interstate's shock and awe political campaign was something to behold. In my imagination I saw First Interstate say to Melamed Communications, "I don't care what it costs, money is no obstacle, win the campaign. If we lose Oakwood it will be because you failed." When faced with the unlimited resources of a global capitalist, to quote Melville, "I saw the opening maw of hell". First Interstate's campaign was personified by the aggressive and bullying demeanor of the managers and workers paid to counter-demonstrate at our *No on 96* rally at Mayfield and Green; fortunately they left promptly one hour after arrival, but not until one of them made a racially incendiary remark.

The First Interstate campaign probably used 13 mailings, including a DVD and an 8 page glossy brochure, endorsements from mayors of other cities who have First Interstate developments (would any of them have the courage to refuse a requested endorsement when the First Interstate development in their city is a larger enterprise than their city government?) the endorsement of Sun News, the Plain Dealer, use of the Legacy Village sign and many illegal placements and removals of signs. They ran full page ads in newspapers and had a large advertising presence on the internet. Not to mention the incessant TV commercials, complete with the \$2400 worth of make-up.

It is important to note that the elected city officials included in the commercials were Georgine Welo and David Miller, both of whom were also running for re-election.

The opposition outspent us as least 4 to one. We will see the final campaign reports in December; even these will not be the full accounting of all resources used in the campaign. Happily, all the money they spent probably helped the economy and they did create jobs by hiring people to work on the campaign. (I wonder if a single volunteer worked on their campaign.)

Located at the intersection of 3 cities and 2 school districts, *Oakwood always was and will continue to be a regional issue*. Our government officials failed us again on this count; only Julian Rogers was somewhat receptive to our regional concerns.

Most people trust their government officials to have their best interest at heart and to make expert decisions on their behalf; Ohio law says that if citizens do not like the land use decisions made in their community, their only recourse is to vote officials out of office.

In this land use decision, South Euclid city officials, according to Jane Goodman, worked in "partnership" with First Interstate. So the citizens of South Euclid had no one looking objectively at the best and highest use for Oakwood. Most disturbing was that this partnership of South Euclid city officials and First Interstate used the campaign tactic of pitting the residents of South Euclid against the residents of Cleveland Heights. This tactic of inciting one group of people against another was carried out by mayor

Georgine Welo and council members Jane Goodman and David Miller. If you were in favor of developing Oakwood you could be from anywhere (remember the letters from the mayors of Lyndhurst, Willoughby, Avon and the economic and community development director from Mentor). But if you were against developing Oakwood, you could only be from South Euclid.

This talking point based on turning one group of people against another was echoed in the media. The concern of Cleveland Heights' citizens was described as meddling, not as an indication that this was, logically, a *regional issue* because Oakwood straddles both cities. An opportunity for a higher order discussion of regionalism was lost.

City officials used their political skills to incite one group of people against another, not to successfully negotiate with First Interstate for a living wage for those working in Oakwood Commons, or the right of first hire for residents of South Euclid, or a dark store provision or more than minimal "sustainable" building practices. South Euclid politicians used their rhetorical abilities to discourage people from working together. I never saw any of them use their considerable political skills to negotiate with the developer on behalf of the people they represent. They seemed intimidated by him at the meetings I attended, did his bidding and never understood the value of the land they gave away.

Don't think it didn't have a chilling effect on residents of Cleveland Heights. Many of us no longer feel welcome in the city of South Euclid. However, I have great affection and respect for the people who worked on the No on 96 campaign and for the 3,460 people who voted to stop big box on Oakwood.

But, the fact that Oakwood is not going to be a Metropark is not due to First Interstate's purchase of the property. Oakwood was for sale for a year prior to its purchase by First Interstate. Not one city official from Cleveland Heights or South Euclid, including the council members, mayors, and city manager did anything to preserve Oakwood. This also means that people and groups with influence and the planning commissions in both cities did not exert pressure on elected officials to preserve Oakwood.

No matter how loud or long they chant that they are sustainable or "green", it is patently false that the cities of Cleveland Heights or South Euclid value sustainability, the environment or the concept of livable cities. Cities that gave up the last largest greenspace in the inner ring suburbs of Cleveland are not "sustainable" or concerned about the environment. As you move about our community, consider what greenspace we have left.

There are many, many people to thank. I sincerely apologize if I have overlooked thanking anyone; no one deserves to be unappreciated or overlooked. It was easy to ignore our efforts, but helpers and supporters were everywhere and came when we needed them the most. Every email was important to us and provided much needed moral support and helpful comments and suggestions. Every letter or email to the newspaper, or to a public official, every contribution to Facebook and to Cleveland.com or other blog, every document composed or analyzed was essential to our effort. We thank each and every one of you who did the unending work in our long effort to preserve Oakwood. You circulated and signed petitions, attended meetings and events, spoke up at city council meetings and public hearings, canvassed neighborhoods, worked the phones, talked to your friends, put up signs, and lent your name

and presence to campaign literature, walked and talked to your neighbors, donated money and voted to create a better future of our community.

We had helpers who preferred to remain in the background, but I would like to thank *all* the local businesses and organizations in South Euclid and Cleveland Heights who supported us. Special thanks go to John Zagara of Zagara's grocery store and to South Euclid business owners Regina Henderson of Babycakes Bakery and Bhavesh Patel of J&M Mart who appeared on our campaign literature. For a complete list of our organization and business supporters, please see the list of Coalition for Oakwood members on the Citizens for Oakwood website, www.CitizensforOakwood.com. Please support our local businesses.

I would like to give special thanks to the students at Kramer Law Clinic and their supervising attorney, Professor Matt Rossman. The simple truth is that Oakwood would not have made it to the ballot without them. Other attorneys also helped us in our efforts to preserve Oakwood and provided much needed skills and advice. We also thank the Ohio Supreme Court who twice supported the right of citizens to vote on Oakwood.

The destruction of the greenspace at Oakwood will have a very large impact on the wildlife that live there. Please be careful of the deer that will be displaced; they live on the margins as it is, but now this major loss of habitat will be force them onto the roads. This could cause severe injury to people in the cars that hit deer.

For hundreds of years migratory birds transversing the globe had Oakwood as a place to rest and feed on their long journey. It will no longer be available to them. For many species, there is no way to substitute for this loss.

I hope you will consider a generous donation to the Trust for Public Land and other land conservation organizations so that other greenspace can be conserved. Please remember that the Trust for Public Land optioned Oakwood and tried to purchase it in order to preserve it. Who knows what would have happened if either South Euclid or Cleveland Heights city officials had the foresight or wisdom to work with them?

It also now more important than ever to support the Metroparks and Forest Hill Park, our city parks and local conservation groups, including the local chapter of the Sierra Club, Kirtland Bird Club and Shaker Lakes.

Of all the possible land uses, permitting Oakwood to be developed as big box will bring the lowest financial and social benefits to the community. Using this resource in this way tells the broader community what kind of cities we are and what we value.

Although local issues and local politics may not be as interesting as those acted out on a larger stage, they are a good investment of time as they have the most impact on the quality of your life.

As always, I thank you for hearing me out.

Fran Mentch

ADDENDUM: Food for thought going forward.

The original plan for Oakwood Commons included retail being built on the Cleveland Heights portion of Oakwood and another entrance to Oakwood Commons being built in Cleveland Heights, across from Harwood Rd. You can see the map of this on page 3 of [this PDF](#).

Developing the Cleveland Heights section of Oakwood will require rezoning, as it is currently zoned as residential. The description of First Interstate's proposed development, other than the retail portion is [listed in this article](#).

What will happen to Severance Town Center once Oakwood Commons is built?

The Cleveland Heights Planning Commission is scheduled to meet on 12/14/11 at 7pm in Council Chambers. This planning commission has documented and demonstrated their interest in [developing Oakwood](#). The commission's agendas and minutes are never posted on the Cleveland Heights website; there is no way to tell if Oakwood is scheduled to be discussed at that or a future meeting. So, if you have questions it may be best to contact the city manager, Bob Downey at citymanager@clvhts.com or 216-291-3737 or the Planning Director, Richard Wong at rwong@clvhts.com or 216-291-4878.