

## Changing it up

By barry cassidy

I am going to expand my column focus a little this month to deal with the issue of change and introducing change in an area. I have worked in a number of different communities throughout the commonwealth and have introduced change as part of the main street manager program.

I remember on my first day of my first main street job in Loch Haven, a local realtor summoned me. He told me in no uncertain terms that everyone was happy about the way things were going and...and, although he thought I probably had a lot of good ideas, they were not looking to make any changes. Many other places braced for change like Downingtown and some endorsed change like South Street.

Change sometimes happens in ways that we do not expect. Currents of society sometimes bring a change in the way people live their lives. Changes in society like the adoption of legal abortion affected everyone who is part of the reproductive process in society. People maintaining faithfulness to the values before the change will continue to live their lives in a manner they deem appropriate. As they continue to practice their beliefs, the change becomes the norm.

The invention of the computer has had a profound affect on the way society conducts their business. Access to information has enabled people to learn about subjects, which in the past would have been difficult to research. Information was placed in people's hands.

This created some situations of action being forced by the revelation that an incident has happened. Things that in the past that would take days or weeks to be publicized are now documented as they happen. People in authority are asked to react instantaneously. Now some guy in Indonesia sneezes and the price of oil goes up 5 cents a barrel.

Cultural change is difficult to manage, when it happens it can spread in unexpected ways. A main street manager implementing change may get unexpected results from the action. In most cases the issue would not be on the level of abortion or as wide sweeping as the computer but could hit home in a number of different populations.

When I first arrived in Phoenixville, there was a need to deal with the perceived lack of safety factor in the downtown. I studied the problem and realized that individuals that provided that perceived feeling populated the two benches in the center of town. They were selling drugs and sex from that bench and there was not much anyone could do about it. They have the right to sit on the bench.

I had the benches removed to introduce an interruption in the activity. I found that it was a very unpopular move. People had been sitting on the benches for a number of years and although the problematic people populated the bench, the benches had its legitimate loungers too. I had affected not only the culture of the drug dealers it affected the borough by eliminating a long-standing tradition of hanging ten at the corner in downtown.

Other changes ensued as the people who were putting their trash in the public trashcan were without a place to through their daily bag of trash. One woman was beside herself, because she just had a baby, now bags of dirty diapers started appearing all over town. It was weird for a while she kept putting the bags where the trashcan used to be...like it was a designated trash pick up or something.

Then there were the patrons of the casino bus. Since there was free parking most of the people parked all day in the downtown parking lot and took a trip to Atlantic City. The patrons were upset that the benches were removed. Some of them threatened not to come to the center of town and park all day. I could not understand why that was a threat but they thought it was.

Although there was an original intention, there were elements concerning different issues that became known because of the action. Most of the results were positive for me because it eliminated a specific destination for purveyors of narcotics and sex trade workers. Some casino patrons were parking somewhere elsewhere which freed up spaces in the parking lot downtown. I also had the unexpected result of finding bags of poop around town at least until she potty trained the kids.

The potty training timetable did not work for me. I then went to the landlord and chatted about the bags of poop. I asked him if he could provide an alternative to the current poop disposal method. He explained to me that there was no place for people to store their garbage except inside. I felt the woman's pain. Baby poop smells as much as and maybe even more than any other poop. I was able to work out a solution whereby the landlord dealt with the storage situation and thank goodness that the baby poop stopped appearing.

Subsequent actions concerning the purveyors and workers were easy because they were mobile. I would 911 purveyors all the time, right in front of them. You could see them scatter when I came down the street. I organized a community watch to keep the purveyors out of the neighborhoods. We 911'ed purveyors moving onto the side streets.

I followed up with the sex workers and created a zone on the sidewalk, which was delineated with a sign, and some chalk marks, which explicitly forbid them from entering. The space was just a 6 x 10 square that broke the routine of walking up one side and back down the other.

I also followed up with the cars and pick up trucks that trolled the street looking for the sex workers. We took their license numbers down and reported them to the police as they did not seem to know the difference between a sex worker and a mom pushing a baby stroller.

It is change, upon change, upon change, upon change that results in lasting change. Every time you implement one change a couple of other changes happen as a result of the initial change. The sequence of change goes like this...if I go there I can do this, if I go there I think I can do this, if I go there I may be able to do this and if I go there I cannot do this.

Each time you address one issue other issues come up in relation to the initial issue. If you follow the trail and you are faithful to your mission, you will accomplish change. The change you get may not be the change you want. You also may get change that excludes you from the loop of change.