

May 2019 Column

Being in public office can sometimes give you whiplash. It proves Newton's law that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Newton was a physicist, not a politician, but his law also applies to human behavior.

Here's an action – We get a complaint at city hall about a vacant lot that's overgrown with weeds. We subsequently notify the owner of the lot that he should mow the lot or face a fine.

Here's the opposite reaction – The owner of the lot says that his weeds are not weeds at all, but they are wildflowers, and he won't mow them until they are done blooming. See what I mean? Both parties are well-meaning, and believe they are doing the right thing.

One man's weeds are another man's wildflowers.

Here's another action – We spend several years and millions of dollars repairing streets and buried infrastructure in our traditional neighborhoods. Residents lived through mud, dust, noise and all sorts of misery. It wasn't fun, but it got done. The streets are now smooth as a baby's rear end, and the drainage works to perfection.

You know the old adage – “no good deed goes unpunished”?

Well, here's the reaction – now some of the residents on these nice, smooth streets are upset because, as they say, their street has become a “freeway”. I understand this, because I've observed the change myself.

I don't know about a freeway, but yes, the cars are driving faster. We've placed speed monitors on many of these newly surfaced streets, and in reality, there is very little speeding going on. What is happening is that cars are actually driving 30 mph for a change. Where before, drivers were dodging potholes, washboard surfaces and dips at 15 - 20 mph, they are now at a sustained 30 mph. Try this experiment– stand on the street curb, and have someone drive by you within 10 feet at 30 mph. It's disturbingly fast.

So... what do you do?

Speed bumps? Well, those are expensive to install, impossible to maintain properly, create problems for emergency vehicles, and ruin cars' suspensions.

Increase radar patrols? Yes, on through streets like Mountain, and eventually College when it's done, but radar on regular residential streets is difficult. It can be done from time to time, just for show, but I doubt that there will be much actual traffic over 30 mph down these shorter blocks. And then there will be the reaction from the violators about running a police state, and trying to squeeze revenue out the populace.

And now the one possible solution that I find most difficult and questionable – Lowering the speed limit to 25 mph. At first, I actually thought this would be a good move in the right direction. However, I've learned that it would also lead to confusion, since the default speed has been 30 mph forever. We would not only have to replace existing speed limit signs, but also add more signs to increase awareness. This could be very expensive. I'm also told that taking the limit down to say, 25 mph would not significantly change driver behavior.

To tell you the truth, we haven't really got this speeding thing figured out yet. So, if you have any suggestions, let me or your councilmember know what you think about it.

In the meantime, be warned and be aware that we will be increasing radar patrols on many of these newly paved streets. This will not be for revenue for the city, it will be for the safety of our citizens. Traffic fines hardly pay for themselves – they are not a revenue generator for anybody but the State of Texas, but that's a whole other story.

Gosh I love this town!