

SHANNON'S LAW

# The Real Slim Shady

Scott Case calls shade tree plan "socialistic"

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The furor over the latest allegedly-obscene offering from Marshall Mathers, a.k.a. Eminem, provoked little more than a yawn at our house. However much of a stretch it might be for bluenose critics like Michael Medved, freedom of artistic expression is one of those absolutes — unless you yell "Moviet" in a crowded fire station or something like that.

Of course, there is obscenity a plenty on display in our town where 400 shocked local residents witnessed an obscene abuse of power at a recent meeting of the Greenville County Council. Vice-chairman Scott Case and a handful of his council cohorts thwarted the will of the people yet again to further their own peculiar ideology when they took a measure that would require shade trees in new parking lots and exiled it to a likely death in committee.

As a result, the chances are slim that any shade will be available in developments scheduled for construction in Greenville. Case and fellow council member Dr. Bob Taylor led the charge to bury the proposal, which would have required one shade tree for every 20 parking spaces. Similar regulations are on the books in almost every major city. Dr. Taylor, a math professor at Bob Jones University, said he did not like the idea of requiring developers to plant trees and fretted about unspecified safety concerns.

Case went even further, introducing an amendment that would have required the county to reimburse developers for any costs they incurred. That motion failed, but Case still denounced the proposal as "socialistic." This will come as a shock to those Soviet puppets Charleston, Charlotte and Spartanburg, where such requirements have been on the books for years.

The crowd who assembled at County Council to support the shade tree measure were dismayed by the conduct of Case, Taylor and company, who hid

behind procedural rules to avoid listening to any citizens who wanted to speak that night. For his part, a defiant Case declared such input would have no impact on him because he opposed the shade requirements "on principle."

The practical application of that principle can be seen at the vast, treeless parking lot that surrounds the new Cherrydale Point shopping center. Diane Eldridge of Upstate Forever argues that absent such regulations, out-of-town developers have little incentive to provide adequate greenspace in their projects.

Indeed, the original plans for Cherrydale Point included significant landscaping with shade trees islands in the parking lots. Somewhere along the way, the developer of that project, AIG Baker of Birmingham, Ala., removed those items from their construction agenda. A spokesperson for the developer refused to comment on the issue of shade trees at Cherrydale Point, but the results speak for themselves.

If Case and Taylor had pocketed money from developers to kill the shade tree ordinance, at least it would make some sense. But these guys apparently gutted the regulations because of a belief that whatever indignity some real estate developer wants to inflict on the body politic is his or her guaranteed right under a perverse interpretation of laissez faire capitalism.

In the world according to Case and Taylor, private property rules supreme. The fact that trees can convert carbon dioxide to oxygen, that tree islands can absorb ground water runoff and that shade from those trees dramatically reduces heat should not impact the bottom line. These men could care less what those 400 citizens — or you and I, for that matter — have to say.

That is their right, of course. And the voters have the right to hold them accountable for their actions and for the contempt they display to the citizens. If you do not live in the districts represented by Case or Taylor, you still have a

role to play if these issues are important to you. Six other members of council supported their efforts to bury the shade tree measure. Of the Republicans on council, Phyllis Henderson alone voted to suspend the rules at that meeting to allow shade tree proponents a chance to speak.

Believe me when I tell you this will not be the end of the controversy. For starters, there are 400 citizens who got a tough civics lesson down at the council chambers that night. They will not forget the way they were treated, and many took exception to the obvious belief by the council majority that what they thought didn't matter.

Two incumbent members of council who voted with Case and Taylor will face strong Democratic challengers in the fall. Without raising a finger, those candidates got a boost last week. Pam Shucker will try to unseat Mark Kingsbury in District 19, and Judy Gilstrap will oppose Allen "Bunk" Johnson for the District 26 seat.

Kingsbury, who represents the Berea and the Furman area, has a reputation for catering to developers. Johnson had voted for the ordinance on a first reading, but joined with the Case and Taylor faction at the most recent meeting. These actions will provide Shucker and Gilstrap with ammunition for the fall campaign. Most voters will be familiar with the intense heat of the treeless parking lot at Cherrydale Point, although they may not have realized just how that came to be. Count on Shucker and Gilstrap to remind them.

In addition, Dan Moravec is seeking the District 28 seat that came open when Bob Cook filed to run for another office. The idea that local elections should be nonpartisan has been discarded here, and many motions are routinely passed at county council with the three Democratic members on the losing end of 9-to-3 votes.

Taylor and Case do not come up for

reelection until 2004. Case has made no secret of his ambition to succeed Jim DeMint in the U.S. Congress, although it is difficult to understand how his scorched earth ideology will help him assemble a majority of the voters there. Sure, it is a conservative district, but the extreme right-wing views of Case are clearly beyond mainstream conservatism. Take his position on shade trees, for example.

Meanwhile, this is the same county council that thinks they can persuade city voters to approve an additional one cent sales tax and hand control over to a board dominated by the county. Maybe if they promise to throw in a couple of shade trees they might have a chance.