



Source: Caroline Kitchener/The Washington Post, as posted in The Lily.

Well, reluctantly, I have been hectored into posting about the Town of Vienna again. If you're not a TOV resident, move on.

**Caveat: I haven't done my proper due diligence on this.** Haven't so much as bothered to look up the facts. Because I'm just so sick of Town of Vienna bureaucracy.

So let me do the weasel-word thing and say, suppose.

Suppose I said that you, as an American, have the right to post a sign in your yard expressing any political opinion you choose. Like the farmer pictured above. Which, although I don't like the message, I have to applaud the ingenuity.

You'd say, "duh". Because this isn't Communist China. This isn't the (former) USSR. This is America, right? Damned right, I can say what I want, on my own property.

Right up to what's allowed, in general. Famously, the First Amendment does not give you

the right to shout “Fire” in a crowded theater. For example, advocating the violent overthrow of government, or threatening elected officials (used to be?) is illegal. And, likely, endorsing criminal acts — such as advocating violence against an individual — likely that would be illegal.

But beyond that, presumably, if you want to put a sign, on your own private property, expressing an opinion. Even an ugly opinion. You can.

Now suppose I said, well .... maybe. Depends on how long you intend to express that opinion. Suppose I said, after N days, you have to stop expressing that opinion. Even if it’s free speech, as protected in the Constitution. Because The Town Council in tiny little Vienna VA knows better. With a proposed piece of legislation.

And your Town Council is focused on neatness. As in, neat-freak-level neatness. And, hey, that’s just so sloppy, having signs around for more than a little bit. So let’s shut that down.

Now, I may be misunderstanding this. But as this has been relayed to me, in the Town of Vienna, **you have 90 days to express that opinion.** As proposed. Or maybe just 60 days. Black Lives Matter. Make America Great Again. Eat at Joes. It doesn’t matter.

Under proposed legislation, after 90 days (or maybe just 60 days), your sign has to come down. By law. Because the omnipotent and omniscient Vienna Town Council orders it so.



Now, let's get real. The only widespread set of signs, in individual yards, that remained in place for more than 90 days, within living memory, were my signs. These signs. Shown at left.

Damned awkward, that was. The principal charge from the citizens involved in MAC development was to maintain Vienna's small-town ethos. And here was somebody publicly reminding the town of that.

And, as low-tech as they were, they got people aware of what the Town Council was up to.

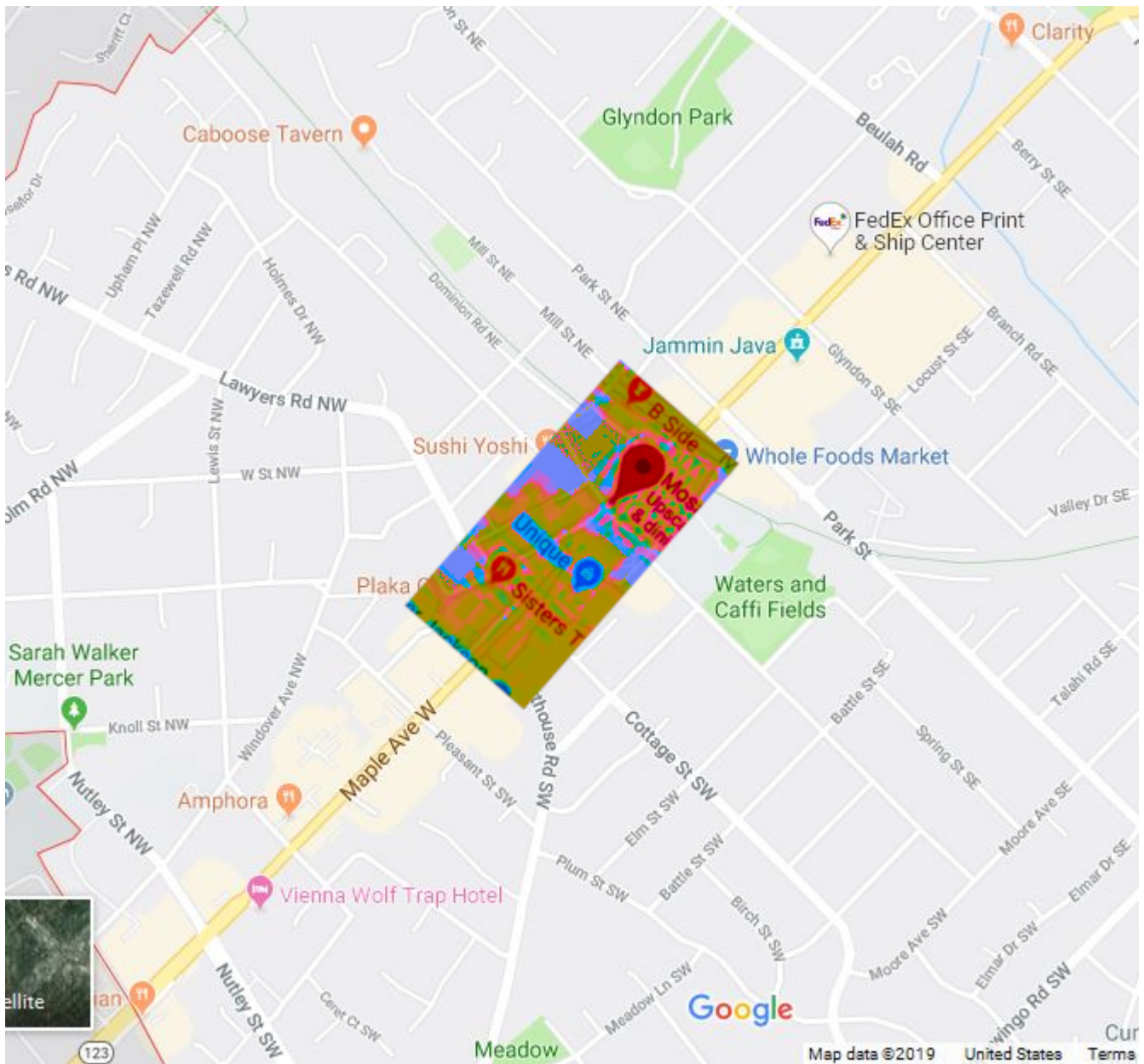


And I recycled them responsibly, to boot. Again, at left.

Eventually, the Town Council repealed that MAC law. So these humble, locally-printed long-lived lawn signs ended up being an effective example of real grass-roots democracy.

Kind of.

I take no credit for that. Had it been a good law, I'd have been wasting my time. As it was, I take credit only for pointing out the facts. And having good sense prevail.



Above: Merrifield Mosaic District, overlain on the Town of Vienna MAC zoning district.

And now, as the Town bureaucracy goes about re-writing all the zoning in Vienna. During the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring that it is awkward, at best, for people to participate in that. Somehow, right now, that's the perfect time for the Town to prevent any recurrence of a long-lived lawn-sign-based protest.



Right now, apparently, is the ideal time to prevent any repeat of what occurred with MAC. Ahem. In terms of citizen opposition.

Yeah. Sure. As a patriotic American, that makes great sense to me. Let's make sure that the last effective means of citizen protest, for our last attempt at rewriting the zoning, can't be used this time. As the Town bureaucracy plows ahead with rezoning, despite taking advantage of the pandemic and all the restrictions that imposes on citizen participation.

But wait, there's more. Did I mention that if you have a sign **in your own home**, that can be seen from outside, the Town is going to regulate that as well? Yep. That's the plan. So, forget yard signs. If you dare to post anything in your window, that somebody objects to, the Town's going to assert the right to come after you.

If you have an objection to this — or if you actively favor it — I suggest that you send an email to your Town Council members. Let them know how you feel about it.

But under no circumstances should you post a sign in your yard /s. Or, at least, don't post one for more than 90 (or maybe 60) days. That's no longer going to be legal, in the Town of Vienna.

If I have been mislead about this, I apologize in advance. But I don't think I have.

I literally don't have the stomach for sitting through the tapes of Town Council and Planning Commission meetings, to try to pin down the facts on this one. If necessary, I will provide citations as to source. In fact, it might be a healthy thing, to quote all the relevant Town officials who have heartily endorsed this.

It's just so over-the-top, that ... well, of all the things I need to worry about right now, finding any one of a dozen ways to dodge this ham-handed law is way down on my list.

Now I have to waste my time taking a detailed look at this, and whatever else the Town is up to.

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