

# Public Domain

by Steve Krulick, Village of Ellenville Trustee

## Road (Rally) Rage

*"He who dares not offend cannot be honest."*

– Thomas Paine, philosopher and writer (1737-1809)

This is a slight detour from what I'd planned as Part 2 of my little series on representative democracy. Or, more precisely, it's a parallel service road from which to get a real-time view of that main highway, as seen from behind the steering wheel of one public representative dealing with one public issue, as an example.

When representatives must make a decision, there are four *rational* ways to prepare: 1 – Get info directly from those making a proposal (submitted written or graphic documents, live or "canned" presentations, questions put to them at a workshop or hearing); 2 – Get info from the local media (in effect, letting the reporters be filters and interpreters); 3 – Do independent research in person, by phone, or online (getting objective and subjective input from those with more knowledge or experience); 4 – Poll constituents (formally or informally, or read/hear the opinions they volunteer).

Sometimes, ideally, one can employ all four logical methods; sometimes, time and practicality may allow as few as one... and incompletely or inadequately at that.

Sometimes, one must "wing it," either because one is unexpectedly hit cold with a decision requiring immediate voting, with no time to get *any* input, or one failed to (or *chose not to*) use the rational methods, and so goes with one's own gut feelings, prejudices, beliefs, opinions, values... whether they confirm or ignore the rational methods (assuming those *were* even employed). Here's one example of how it might play out...

I first learned of the proposed Rally New York in a July 20 *Kingston Freeman* article (eventually, most of what I learned about the Rally was to come from the *Freeman* and *Ellenville Journal*). Claiming "35 to 65 expected participants... the event is expected to draw 1,000 visitors, including 400 competitors, service crews, media crews and officials... along with spectators... the race could generate between \$200,000 and \$450,000 in revenue for the local economy." Having recently voted on a matter of public streets used for private purposes, it hit me that the Rally planned using roads IN Ellenville.

I thus expected Rally organizers to repeat their July 19 Town Board presentation at the July 23 Village Board meeting. But they didn't show; it wasn't even on the agenda. In fact, we were just about to adjourn when Editor Spezio of the *Journal* asked for our reaction to the organizers' presentation to the Town. The Village Manager said, "I don't think the Board is prepared to respond to that until they meet with the Chief of Police."

The Deputy Mayor, filling in for the absent Mayor, said, "Once we get a little more information about it, and the Chief and the Town Board speaks of it, we'll be able to make comments more clearly." I wondered *when* we'd learn more and be asked for *our* required approval.

A July 26 *Journal* article revealed more info, including some complaints that apparently led to recent host towns denying some road access and not re-hosting, raising a serious red flag for me (Why? Would we find out?): "The [town] board was interested in exploring the event's possibilities but were also somewhat leery of what the race would mean with regard to safety concerns, the inconveniencing of town residents, and wear and tear on town roads... The board is also seeking some direction from town residents

regarding their feelings about the race. The board will decide by its August 2 meeting whether it will approve the race or not."

The *Freeman* reported on that Town meeting; in spite of overwhelming protest "from town residents," the three present Board members OK'd the request, a bit surprising given past instances of "the people having spoken." More puzzling, the "Village Manager... said village officials generally support the race." As I had said nothing favoring the race, and Trustee Hyatt stated, "It would be an irresponsible move to approve this," I wondered just how that support "generally" manifested.

Posting to the *Freeman's* online comments (and the *Journal's* forum), I wrote: "When a few vocal people told the Town Board they were PRO Wal-Mart, ignoring the concerns of those urging caution who came armed with FACTS, the Board rolled over and refused to act on the concerns of those who wished to see protections in place, but claimed 'the people have spoken.' Yet, here, when a sizable number of residents came to protest the rally, or had serious concerns, the Town Board (or the three council members actually there) seemed to be oblivious, and acted on some other inner light."

"At a time when oil and gas prices have hit record levels, and our addiction to oil has left us unprepared to deal with the soon-to-be-acknowledged arrival of "peak oil," that is, the FACT that oil demand has begun to exceed production (which daily extraction worldwide has itself peaked and is showing signs of decline), that this wasteful and indulgent activity, of cars burning up this precious resource for no social benefit other than the amusement of a few, sends the wrong message and only hastens the day when we find ourselves with fuel either too expensive to buy for everyday use, or unavailable."

Already suspicious of what I saw as over-hyped claims and defensiveness, I noticed an August 3 press release on their Rally website presumptuously showing opening and closing events *already* set in downtown Ellenville, before any official Village approval had been given! Did someone overstep? The release said, "a new community that is welcoming our event and will be rolling out the red carpet"? Oh? Did the Town Board crowd sound like a "welcoming" one? Hardly.

"They are anxious to hear the sound of racecars in their town again!" SEZ WHO?!!! Not them; not me!

Later on, while out of town for a week, I sent an email listing concerns I wanted read aloud at the August 13 Village Board meeting; it wasn't given the courtesy of a public reading. I also presumed the Village public was indifferent, as I only received one phone message on the matter (not heard until I got home; too late, alas), from a town resident on Wintish Road (one of the roads involved), asking if the Rally could still be prevented.

Had I been home, I would have voted *NO*, basing my decision on: 1 – No timely presentation by those requesting approval; 2 – Disturbing media reports; 3 – Some direct research, mostly on the Rally's website; 4 – Constituents apparently not moved enough either way to give guidance; 5 – My built-in BS detector sniffing out rampant overselling of benefits, too much defensiveness, and galling presumptuousness. So, rationally and by my gut, I would have been comfortable with my *NO* vote.

I bet an authoritative audit would show that final numbers for participants, spectators, and revenue were far lower than hyped, while costs, damages, and injuries were greater than they dismissed up front.

Summarizing my Sept. 24 Village Board meeting analysis – "When a bunch of self-indulgent big boys are desperately seeking a last-minute playground for their expensive toys, but disingenuously wrapping it in the flag of how they're doing *us* a favor, I say: 'Don't pee on my leg and tell me it's raining.'"