

# OPINION

## Remember neighborliness

The unruly Somers neighborhood plan meeting that ended abruptly last week with planners calling the sheriff's office is a sad example of the current trend of growing incivility in public discourse.

There is no excuse for it.

No matter how much property owners believe the planning process is misguided. No matter how much they want to protect their land from the changes they believe a neighborhood plan could bring. No matter how many of their questions have not yet been answered, there is absolutely no excuse for what went on at the Somers Middle School when planning staff members attempted to give an explanatory presentation about neighborhood plans.

County Planning Director Jeff Harris had barely begun the meet-

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ing when he was interrupted by audience members, and the diatribe quickly turned ugly. Upset property owners shouted profanity-laced accusations as the meeting dissolved into a raucous shouting match.

Frankly, it was a sad episode.

Since Day One, Americans have taken pride in the fact that in this country, there is a right for people to peaceably assemble. We have principles for civil dialogue that include respectful and courteous discussion and participation. We strive to provide a safe environment where a range of perspectives can be heard and respected.

Several Somers area residents attended the meeting hoping to learn about the neighborhood-

plan process so they can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate or support the effort. Their right to be part of the public process was taken away by the hotheads who chose to disrupt that process.

Emotions tend to run high when it comes to planning. But we can't let fear, frustration or even paranoia get in the way of civility and common decency.

Somers neighborhood plan supporter Kathy Robertson, who said she was personally threatened by opponents, is right when she said, "this is Montana at its worst."

It's time to find common ground and common courtesy. Whether you believe in neighborhood plans or not, all Montanans — now as in the past — ought to strive to be neighborly.