

NSN EXPRESS

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A No Standing News Special Edition / Fast reading for busy people

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“This issue of NSN rated PG”

Rolla School Board Sells Land to Video Porn Chain

Also: Janese Martin Mugs Channel 16 Banned Broadcasts Adams Ultimatum - More Banned Broadcasts We Finance! Baum Bombs in Maryville RCTA Bad Poets Society The Hohenfeldt Solution More TIF tales Cooking the Rec Center Books

In the how-much-dumber-can-they-get category... While still waist deep in their latest sex scandal, the Rolla School Board sold their Main Street property to “**Family Video**”, a misnamed, hard-core video porn franchise. The school board was so anxious to get their hands on the money for their new administration building, they either didn’t ask HR Director Aaron Zalis for details about the buyer he and Mike Woessner came up with or they didn’t care as long as the buyer had cash. The new owner is **Roy Williams** from Ballwin, Missouri. Roy is the regional manager for **Family Video Movie Club, Inc., d/b/a/ Family Video**, headquartered in Springfield, Illinois, a chain with over 200 stores in the Midwest. Roy came to the council meeting on February 18th to get the property rezoned. What a great location for a video porn store, on the busiest street in town just two blocks from the Methodist Church day care center and one block from their good friends on the Rolla School Board. Is this another of the board’s “for the children” deals? We can just see the new Family Porn Store with one of those 50-foot tall neon signs, visible from the highway, announcing the newest release of *Debbie does the Rolla School Board* or *Virginal Vixens*. Yesiree Bob, the Good Life is here in Rolla MO all right. Our grateful school board will surely invite Video Roy to become one of their “Business Partners.” Maybe he will contribute to the school program where merchants give students discounts for good grades. That’s sure to bring the GPA up. Mindful that we should be more POSITIVE and politically correct, we’re positive-ly grateful the school board didn’t sell the land to someone for a crack house.

The city of O’Fallon, Illinois successfully fought a Family Video store. O’Fallon churches threatened pickets and boycotts and the city council was willing to go to court to uphold the moral values of the community (they did a survey and found they had some). Family Video agreed not to have any pornography in their O’Fallon store rather than go through a long legal battle.

The rezoning to allow family porn on Main Street has the blessing of John Petersen, Rolla’s King of TIFF-ing and Zoning, and the P&Z Commission, including the always-alert council member Judy Jepson. Mayor Morgan is also just

pleased as punch to have this new business in town because they told him they would create 15 jobs and give him \$50,000 a year in sales taxes. Thank goodness they didn’t want Buehler Park for their Family Porn Store, Morgan would have gift wrapped it. After all that’s what’s important isn’t it – economic development – at any price? The city will take the final vote on Family Video’s rezoning request at their next meeting on March 3rd.

January 9, 2003: School Board snatches videotape. This was the historic first-ever videotaping of a Rolla School District Board Meeting. Board members, fighting public exposure of their meetings to the very last ditch, turned their microphones upside down, buried them under papers, turned out the lights and generally did whatever they could to keep their discussion of what could be shoehorned into the proposed hybrid Vo Tec/Administration building, from being clearly heard or seen. No such luck, Channel 16 got it all, despite dimmed lights and buried mikes. It seemed as if the First Amendment was finally going to prevail despite their obvious distaste for it but after the meeting the videotape disappeared! **Vocational Director Janese Martin** had snatched the tape right out of the machine. Bad enough that Martin, an educator, was trampling on the First Amendment and the public’s right to know, but isn’t it rather bizarre to steal a tape of a public meeting that was also reported by press and radio? The tape was returned to Channel 16 the following afternoon (after threat of a police report) and it was finally broadcast, but why did Martin take it? What was done to it during the missing 15 hours? Were they worried about their hair and makeup? Jerry Giger, Asst. Superintendent in Charge of Lane Excuses said the board had to check to make sure they didn’t mention a student’s name during the meeting. To do so would be, they claim, a violation of the federal privacy act that protects students.

Hogwash. The board doesn’t talk about students; they talk about spending money. They’re so disinterested in the students they won’t even talk about them generically, for instance discussing why student MAP and SAT scores get worse every year despite aromatherapy and kiwi fruit

experiments. Giger's humbuggery implies that the board cares deeply and sincerely about violating laws, something the state audit, the records of their blatantly illegal meetings and votes, violations of their own policies, the failure of three board members to file campaign finance reports and theft of a tape of their own public meeting, proves they do not. Did they want to edit the part of the meeting where board member Jim Burns was still trying to get them to see that the VoTec/Admin building was a foolish plan, the part where they solemnly promised not to take any cost overruns out of their alleged 'reserves', or was it the part where Keith Strassner declared, "This is a great business plan!" (Business plan? Only a marketing major would think that ill-conceived mess was a business plan.) Maybe the part they wanted to delete was where Supt. Adams said if he had his druthers he'd druther spend the insurance money to build an administration building on some other land the school owns rather than stack it on top of a building in a drainage ditch? It was an honest answer but if he wants to stay here he better quit that. The part of the real meeting they should have erased was the part where they all voted to build themselves another office building.

January 23, 2003: They did it again! At the board's so-called "work/study" meeting on January 23, Martin didn't steal the tape and run, this time she told Steven Leonard he couldn't videotape the meeting at all (thus avoiding the indignity of another camera mugging). She said Dr. Adams had promised the two VC students (both adults) who are supposed to help with the video taping, they wouldn't have to be out late more than one night a month. Martin said they weren't present so the videotape simply could not be made in their absence...because Adams promised...you know...the two guys...they could go beddy-bye early. Well, it's certainly worth breaking the First Amendment to keep a promise like that isn't it? In the lengthy heated argument that ensued with Channel 16 owner Steve Leonard, Janese changed her excuse and said Dr. Adams had agreed to let only the "executive" or "regular" board meetings be viewed by the public, not the so-called work/study sessions. Martin is a fool – first for acting as district tape snatcher and then First Amendment bouncer for a superintendent and board who didn't want to do their own

dirty work. That's a high price to pay for getting your little empire expanded. Janese, like her employers, shows herself to be ignorant of the Sunshine Law and much too willing to follow orders. There is no such thing as "executive" meetings, "business" meetings or "work/study" meetings. **State law recognizes only two kinds of meetings: "open" meetings or "closed" meetings.** They can call them "Work/Study" meetings, "Let's Spend Money" meetings or "Chicken and Chew With the Council" meetings but regardless of name they are ALL either "open" or "closed" public meetings and ALL open meetings can be recorded by any citizen who wants to make an audio or video tape - that of course, includes TV stations. Were the notes of the RDN and KTTR reporters also confiscated for the board to censor "in case a student name was mentioned"? No they weren't.

...and again at the February 13th board meeting. Superintendent Adams made this point very emphatically. He would permit the next work/study meeting on February 27, to be videotaped only because there was an item on the agenda to be voted on regarding the refinancing of the 1997, GO bonds. Adams said, *"It is not our intention to allow work/study meetings to be televised otherwise."* Not allow? When it suits their convenience they can violate their own policy which says, *"no action will be taken at these [work/study] sessions"* but they will "not allow" the public to see them discussing public business – just the meeting where they take the votes on public business that was discussed and decided during the blacked-out work/study meeting. Board President Bass, when faced with any inconvenient rule or law, often says, "Well, we're the board; we can do anything we want" and so they do. Such arrogance is insufferable from people who are reckless about debt, who carelessly create lawsuits, steal tapes, ban broadcasts, and now have foisted a hard-core porn shop on us. This sounds like more ham-fisted legal advice from Ms. Celynda Brasher who advises them on all their other constitutional violations. Is our expensive superintendent able read and understand the Sunshine Law himself or is he, like Martin willing to be the fall guy for another illogical and indefensible board edict?

What you missed when the board banned the broadcast

"No Credit? Bad Credit? No Problem. We Finance!"

Question: Is that: a. the recipe for financial ruin, b. slogan from the used car lot across from the former admin building or, c. the school board's financial policy? *Answer:* All of the above. As an afterthought at the January 23rd meeting the board added another million dollars to the April bond issue. Now it's \$8.5 million instead of \$7.5 million. Can they afford another million in debt? No, but they can't afford to pay the debt service on the original \$7.5 million either, that's why they're postponing the payments for ten years. If you can't afford the first \$7.5 million, does it matter if you add another million to it? No Credit? Bad Credit? No Problem. They Finance! Now you see why they didn't want you to watch.

Baum Bombs in Maryville. The public also missed seeing: the discussion and vote on the ballot language and the great big loophole they planted in it, the information by **Bricker** from **George K. Baum** on refinancing their old debt (which he called "a bit of a Chinese puzzle") and the decision to again use negotiated bonds ('negotiated' means Baum gets all the fees) because Bricker assured them that they wouldn't save any money by bidding out the lucrative contracts on the \$8.5 million bonds. The board swallowed that propaganda despite having just been reprimanded for this cozy practice in their state audit. They won't competitively bid the financings, not because they checked on his story but because the Baum guys

are nice and they're too lazy to check on their story. We believe him; don't you believe him? Would anyone lie to make money? At about the same time our board was taking that touching vote of confidence in George K. Baum here in Rolla, the Maryville school board was firing Baum for miscalculating their bond debt. The screwed up bond mess George K. Baum left Maryville with will not cover their planned new elementary school construction. But they're really nice guys.

Bad Poets Society. January 19-26 was Board Appreciation Week and best (or worst) of all the public missed seeing the admiring Rolla Community Teachers Association shower board members with flowers and gifts complete with what has become the annual public reading of a flattering poem about the board. It was ironic that the teachers, with their flowers, poetry, gifts and adulation were oblivious to the fact that financial decisions (apparently way over their heads) were being made at that same meeting which could eat up their third stage raise from the 80¢ levy and affect their salaries, benefits and even their jobs for the next two decades. The RCTA wasn't interested in that boring stuff; they left right after the poetry reading. After the February 13th board meeting, Board President Bass and Aaron Zalis were interviewed on KTTR. Bass announced that in the event of a shortfall in state funding there would probably be a hiring freeze and increased class sizes. Will next year's poem be a paean of praise?

The Hohenfeldt Solution. In January, county residents were surprised to read in the paper that Council member Charlotte Wiggins, reminded the County Commission of their promise to give her Humane Society money from the "Fight Crime for a Dime" sales tax. Ignoring for the moment that dogs and cats weren't on the ballot and no one remembers hearing anything about this under-the-table campaign promise; (which means it *isn't* worth the ballot paper it *wasn't* written on) if the county has a dime left after the jail is done they have more urgent things to spend it on than stray pets. Wiggins claims that 20% of the strays the city pound gets are from the county. County residents say that the strays they have to bring in to the city pound (and which they pay for) have been dumped in the county by city people. City people, they say, sneak out in the night to dump puppies in county ditches. They ease a bad conscience by telling themselves that farmers have those pet cows so they will be eager to give homes to the unwanted products of failure to get their fertile city pets spayed and neutered. **City people take note:** puppies and kittens dumped in the country just painfully starve to death if coyotes and other wild animals don't kill and eat them first - so rid yourselves of the Norman Rockwell image of Farmer Brown's wife adopting your unwanted puppies. Farmers who raise hamburger for your Big Macs aren't sentimental about animals and can't afford to have wild dogs (if they survive the coyotes) chasing their dumb, but expensive cows and calves. They mostly take care of strays using the now-famous 'Hohenfeldt Solution.' Animal lovers can protest all they want but while meth labs infest the woods and burglars run loose

because Blankenship's Boys are trolling the Interstate in search of headlines, there will be no foolishness about spending scarce county dollars on a bigger city pound. Wiggins should check with Petersen; he can probably blight something and build her a TIF pound.

Interviews on KTTR are worth listening to. KTTR has a new reporter, Chad Petri who does pretty fair interviews with public officials after their meetings. He asks some good questions and makes them explain what they're doing without appearing to be merely boosting their self-serving hype. Most refreshing. Tune in the morning after city council meetings and school board meetings. After the joint city/school board chicken dinner/TIF meeting on January 28, he interviewed John Petersen, Minister of TIF. Chad was having trouble pinning Petersen down on some changes in the TIF tale that emerged from the joint meeting the night before. The official line had changed, now it was not just the sales taxes that would be TIF'd, it was also property taxes – something they denied at first. TIF, Petersen told him, is "a negotiated process" which in cityspeak means everything is on the bargaining table. Callen's corner, Petersen said, is the **first target** with "ten acres to the SE." Petersen denied that they can build buildings with TIF money but that's just not true. The only prohibition in the law against using TIF money for buildings is when the TIF zone is an industrial park. Petersen claimed the developer has to "have deep pockets" to front all the expenses. That's not what TIF cities are doing all over Missouri. Developers are hijacking all kinds of freebies out of cities greedy for new tax revenues to spend.

The Condemnation Gorilla. Petersen and Butz can squirm and deny all they want but the record shows TIF has virtually no restrictions when it comes to giving concessions to developers – that's the reason TIF was created without any public accountability, so cities can give developers anything they want without interference from the public. The Petersen tale is that the city will only use their power of condemnation as a "last resort." "*There will be no need to invoke the public's interest in the property and force a sale.*" Petersen says, "*Ideally,*" the reluctant landowner, the developer and the city will "*work together to agree on a price.*" What a lie. Picture this: Little elderly Mrs. Callen, a drooling developer and the City of Rolla accompanied by their 900 lb. Condemnation Gorilla, explaining to Mrs. Callen what the gorilla will do to her if she doesn't agree to the price the developer wants to pay. Just 'ideal' isn't it?

TIF Commissioners. The Mayor put up his list of six appointments for the TIF Commissioners at the last council meeting and awaited the rubber stamp. Some council members had a hissy-fit because they hadn't been told in advance but by the next meeting all but two did what he wanted. The two holdouts were Harry Keifer (one of the nominees – that must be an interesting story) and the other is Otto Spangenberg. Otto did something both rare and admirable. He called all but one of the nominees to ask if they knew anything about TIF.

One nominee told him he didn't know anything about TIF and didn't want to know anything! Don't know nothin' and don't wanna know nothin'. Looks like Otto stumbled on a prime candidate for the next mayoral race.

The city TIF commissioners will be: **Bill Marshall, Steve Shields, Tom Thomas, Harry Keifer, Lou Magdits** and **Julie Turley**. Marshall and Shields are the presidents of PCB and US Bank respectively; Marshall is also head of the RREC, the new city development committee. If anyone tells you TIF is no big deal and it's just about one little corner, ask yourself what other city committee has two bank presidents and a lawyer on it? County TIF commissioners are **Bud Dean** and **Gerald Pietsch**, School board: **Terry Adams** and **Keith Strassner**, other tax districts: **Tom Arnold**.

The Tax Tango. At their combination fried chicken supper, TIF meeting and love-fest between the city council and the school board the city announced that they were graciously holding off putting up their 1/2cent "no -tax increase" bond issue for infrastructure and Joe's Road (yes, Butz called it Joe's Road – that boy has been reading NSN too much) until after the school board has the first shot at the voters in April. The school board members coyly didn't mention to the city that they have yet another tax increase (that's another no-tax, tax increase) issue to go on the ballot after the bond issue this April. You need a dance card to keep up with the line of tax increases in our future.

The city can't defer putting this tax on the ballot any longer than April 2004, because the land for Joe's Road is Joe's. He gave it to them on condition they build a road for him and if they don't he will take it back. Now is that a nice thing for a mayor to do? The city annexed the whole Southside mostly for his benefit; he should show some gratitude and

donate the land to show what a public-spirited person he is. Maybe they would be grateful for his generosity and name it "Joe's Parkway."

However, at Tuesday's chicken fest, the school board didn't turn a hair when Butz and Petersen flip-flopped and admitted that the TIF district would (as we said and they at first denied) seize *all annual increments in property taxes and half the sales taxes* from the first TIF area for a still undisclosed period of years. It also didn't faze them to hear that Petersen was doing a "feasibility study" of more TIF areas. The school board has been losing a big chunk of property taxes from the industrial park for many years but that doesn't bother them, they also aren't bothered by the crisis in state funding and now they aren't bothered with the loss of more property taxes to the city's TIF zones. There doesn't seem to be any amount of money they do mind losing as long as they think they can get it replaced by district taxpayers by crying that it's "for the children". The most alarming thing is that they aren't alarmed. They behave as if they're living in some parallel universe where the tax machine has no "off" button. Oh yes, they did do one little thing to prepare for state cutbacks. They cut 10% (\$80,000) out of next year's classroom supply budget. That doesn't bother them either. They know the teachers will just add the missing supplies to the parent's school supply lists.

Rec center software problem. The mayor says he can't get financial statements together for the Rec center because they claim they need special software to subtract their expenses from their income. We suggest they use a stick and clay tablet until Bill Gates invents the "Rec Center Money Manipulation" software. He could call it "Soft Scrub". It would scrub out all the red ink and bury it in the cemetery department.

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Notice: We regret that NSN will no longer be available from Mail Boxes Etc. We were banned from their premises during the TIF expose. NSN is still available, however, at the Rolla Free Public Library. American Librarians (bless 'em) really 'get' the First Amendment. We have always been fortunate in Rolla to have smart librarians who value intellectual freedom.

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