

No Standing News

Since we have no standing, we stand with those left standing

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The Tale of the Deficit Pea *City Hall's Secret Park Purchases* *Chamber Pork Ready for More Sauce*

Q. When is a deficit not a deficit? A. When they use bond payment money to hide it. At the January 17th council meeting they voted to transfer **\$494,160.29** from the Rec Center Bond Fund to the Rec Center account to "clear" the Rec Center operating deficit that Butz finally admitted has been accumulating for five years. ("Clear" is Butz code-speak for shifting cash around to cover-up deficits.) Remember how often they told us the Rec Center was just doing great and had such a great month or great quarter? They just didn't report all the other not-so-great months. The real total of Rec Center deficits from '01-'05 has been **\$807,315** but in '03 they "cleared" the deficit up to that point by transferring \$313,156 into the Rec Center fund to remove that embarrassing shortage. They just "cleared" another \$494,160.29 from the last three years. **Councilman Jim Waterman** apparently has been smarting at criticism of the city's deficit budget, so after they did this second fiscal slight-of-hand to "clear" this latest Rec Center deficit from '03-'05, Waterman wanted Butz to issue a press release explaining that "its not the general fund that's paying all those bills. That's not true," Jim said. Jim, it is true. Waterman apparently thinks all those Rec Center bills they couldn't pay just sat around unpaid until they voted that night to rob the Rec Center bond fund surplus to "clear" the deficit. Of course they were paying those bills out of the General Fund Jim, how did you think they were keeping the place open? Butz said he would issue a press release Waterman wanted. We can't wait to see that bedtime story. It would go something like this:

The Tale of the Little Deficit Pea "Once upon a time we had three magic shells and one little Rec Center Deficit Pea. A wicked witch put a spell on the little Deficit Pea and it began to grow. Every year it grew bigger until it was **\$313,156** and it had outgrown the littlest shell so we moved the Deficit Pea to a bigger magic shell. Now no one could see it anymore...it was magic! But another Deficit Pea was growing on the Rec Center. It grew and grew until it was **\$494,160** and was so big it wouldn't fit under the second magic shell, so we moved the second Deficit Pea to the biggest magic shell of all called the **\$11.7 million Bond Repayment Fund** which should only be used to pay down the **\$11.7 million Rec Center debt**. Now no one can see the two Big **\$807,315** Deficit Peas at all, they both vanished...just like magic!" (What's that you say?

There's another Deficit Pea growing on the Rec Center? Well, get some more of those damn shells.)

And when they run out of shells? Here's what they've really done to your family finances. You pay an extra 1/2¢ with every dollar you spend in Rolla to pay off the \$11.7 million Rec Center Bond debt. The 1/2¢ Rec Center Sales Tax Fund fills up the \$11.7 million bond debt fund so the bonds can be paid. Because the economy has been good since 1999, the sales tax income has been more than needed to make the annual bond payments of \$1.1+ million annually so they had a surplus – a WINDFALL - in the sales tax fund. To make the Rec Center debts "magically" disappear they use the windfall from the 1/2¢ sales tax revenues to subsidize the Rec Center deficit. Poof! Deficits magically gone? No, the fund surplus to make bond payments is magically depleted.

There are three problems with their "magic" solution to the chronic Rec Center deficits. **1.** They're going to run out of walnut shells before they run out of annual Rec Center deficits. Poof! Deficit magically returns. **2.** If sales tax revenues erode too much, and they've used the "surplus" in the sales tax fund to pay off continuing deficits they could wind up short of cash to make the bond payments and have to make it up out of the general fund or by putting the bond payments on your property tax bill -something they promised they wouldn't do. Poof! Deficit magically returns. **3.** The 15-year accumulated surplus from the Rec Center 1/2¢ sales tax *could have been used to pay down the bonds early and then the Rec Center 1/2¢ sales tax would have been cancelled and you would not have to keep paying the Rec Center 1/2¢ sales tax on every dollar you spend.* The council didn't discuss that option – relieving you a year or two early of a 1/2¢ sales tax on every dollar you spend in Rolla - they did, however, like Butz' idea of using this little stash of magic walnut shells to hide the embarrassing deficits so now they're going to do it annually.

So you will keep paying the 1/2¢ sales tax until the last hour of the last day of the whole 15 years. The Deficit Pea 'magic' buys them some time to figure out how to get voters to make the 15-year 1/2¢ sales tax a permanent tax to permanently cover the annual Rec Center deficit which they promised us would have a 100% recapture rate and pay for itself.

City Hall Spends \$465,154 on Secret Land Purchases

Things they've admitted to doing. Joe is a very high-maintenance mayor. Some would say he's a very high-pork mayor. He has cost us in many ways but there's one way you

can, you can actually add up what he's cost. We'll be paying off the debt to build Joe's Road for years - about \$3 million. We've paid \$24,721.63 for Joe's expensive 7 ft. cedar fence

(or that's all they'll admit to). In May '05 the council bought from Joe, 2 acres of his unsaleable creek land in his subdivision for \$29,126.33. Most developers have to give a % of land in their subdivisions for a park or the equivalent in cash – but the council paid Joe for his. Now the council has helped Joe get a nice big park next to his subdivision. That should help Joe unload some more lots but **\$3,489,885.82** is way too much pork for one insignificant mayor.

\$436,037 worth of things they haven't admitted to doing: In Oct. 2004, the council secretly bought 10.15 acres for **\$101,500** from the Eppelsheimers. In 2005, they bought a total of 32.08 acres for **\$334,537.86**, (i.e. Elliot condemnation – 12.96 acres, the Taylor purchase – 13.22 acres, the Anderson purchase – 1.36 acres and they also got another 3.54 acres from a subdivision park dedication for \$0.)

In less than 6 months (Oct. '04 – March '05) the council spent a total of **\$436,037.86** to buy (and condemn) **42.23** acres of land but they never said a word to the public about these expenditures. (Add in the 2 acres they bought from Joe in May '05 and they have spent a total of **\$465,164** on park land.) All these new purchases took place in closed meetings. If they thought we would be overcome with delight that they had spent nearly a half-million dollars to buy more park land, don't you think they would have made a big front page announcement to tell us about these wonderful purchases? They didn't say a word. They didn't even spin it in "City Talk," the Mayor's weekly propaganda column.

If you look at the new city Comprehensive Planning maps on the city website these new purchases are the green area between Rolla Street and Hy. O. The big green triangular blob next to Mayor Joe's subdivision is an area almost as big as his whole subdivision. At the August budget meetings they admitted they didn't have the money to develop or maintain the parks they have - they just didn't spell out how much more park land they knew they were talking about than we thought they were talking about. Nearly a half million dollars was spent buying land when Butz knew quite well they had a deficit budget, he was preparing another deficit budget, needed **\$494,160.29** to bail-out the Rec Center debt, the reserves are dangerously low, the city hall renovation will cost - no one knows how much - they're buying more land to build a new "maintenance campus" for Hargis (cost unknown), and that's not all.

They're considering paying **\$511,000** for another park - the Forestry property – and developing it for an estimated **\$250,000** and maintaining it all *FOREVER* for the Chamber (that'll be a 'FOREVER' promise they *will* keep). No wonder Joe is so frantic to sell Buehler Park. No wonder they had to use the bond sinking fund to bail out the Rec Center deficit. No wonder city employees are doing so poorly with annual increases and health insurance.

How much more land have they bought? We don't know; there could be a lot more. That's a question you taxpayers will have to ask your council representatives who vote in those

closed meetings. They were acting on YOUR behalf so why don't they want YOU to know what they've done. We only asked about the area next to Joes's subdivision so we don't know if they've *only* spent **\$436,037.86** on new land purchases or if they've spent a lot more than that.

No "rule of law" for Rolla. When they've completed a purchase in closed session the Sunshine law says they have to make the whole thing public "within 72 hours after the execution of the lease, purchase or sale." They have to tell what they spent our money on, how much they spent, who they bought it from and how each council member voted on it. They didn't do any of that.

The closed sessions are held after the regular council meeting. By the time they're done it may be as late as 10:00 p.m. They go back into open session in an empty room and sometimes Beger or Bushie make an announcement in carefully murky leaglease so even if you were still there you couldn't tell what they're talking about. The minutes of the closed sessions aren't posted on the city web site until after the transactions are final and the council approves the minutes – that may take months. When they do finally put the closed session minutes on the city web site, you still can't tell what they've done. Here's an example: **Oct. 18, 2004:** "*City Counselor Lee Bushie reported that during Executive Session the Council discussed the potential purchase of real estate for use in a public works project for the development of a park. After a brief discussion, a motion was made, seconded, and approved to spend a sum of money to purchase the real estate.*"

That's it. That was your public notice. *Someone* made a motion and *someone* seconded it to buy *something* from *somebody somewhere* for "a sum of money." An official public record sanitized to the point of being useless even for historical purposes. It doesn't tell which council members voted against more deficit spending – if any did. Imagine being afraid to tell who made the motion to buy *something* from *somebody* for "a sum of money." The CIA isn't that paranoid. We're only assuming because of the October 18, 2004 date that this may have been the 10.15 acres they bought from the Eppelsheimers for \$101,500 but there's really no way to tell. Because of the paranoia of sanitized public records like this you could just as easily assume that it was a vote to give another million dollars to the RCDC for a "public works (industrial) park." Given their history, maybe that's what you should assume. They've approved a new Park Master Plan that includes a city park in Hy-Point. It has a ball field, a basket ball court, a big pavilion, 6 picnic tables and a walking path all around it. Maybe that's what they bought for "a sum of money" from *somebody*.

There's only one way to find out what your council representatives have done with your money and how they voted - call and ask them...one at a time. Can you believe what they tell you? You'll have to trust them because there's nothing in their official record to back up their story, is there?

And you wonder why they're raising Little League fees? Well, *somebody's* got to pay for it.

Chamber Pork Ready for More Sauce

The RDN headline said the Chamber “gives city ‘OK’ to proceed with purchase of forest service property.” Well, how nice of the Chamber to ‘allow’ the city to bail them out with the city’s Motel Tax money. **Bill Jenks**, candidate for mayor, *Chamber board member* and RCDC board member (who thinks Joe Morgan “has done a super job”) says the Forestry property would “make a nice park, particularly for walking.” Jenks said that Rolla’s park system should include “more natural areas for hiking and walking separate from the well-manicured parks and ball field areas.” Guess Jenks doesn’t know that since Morgan and Butz dug out one end of Ber-Juan Park and completely destroyed Tory Park which had half the city’s few soccer fields, (the rest are in Buehler Park which they also want to destroy) we don’t have that many well-manicured parks or ball fields left.

Butz eagerly agreed with Jenks and said that after some clean-up efforts (\$250,000 worth) the “land would provide a nicely wooded walking trail.” It might as long as nobody walks off that sheer drop at the back and bounces off the Sirloin Stockade dumpsters – a big liability no one ever mentions when spinning this property as a “nice” city park.

Has Jenks, the mayoral candidate, looked around Rolla lately? We already have 7.2 miles of ‘natural’ areas for hiking and walking. Jenks knows that “clean-up efforts” for the Chamber Estate are already approved and budgeted at \$250,000. He also knows that the new *Park Master Plan* has the Chamber *already scheduled this year for a \$50,000 road* through the property. Who do they think they’re kidding with their “little clean-up” story? Does Jenks, the Chamber-board-member-mayoral-candidate care that other Rolla parks have waited over 25 years for one little swing set? With this Park Master Plan they’ll be waiting another 25 years.

It looks like the Chamber/RCDC mayoral candidate and Butz see eye-to-eye on spending money for the Chamber. The \$511,000 purchase is beginning to look like a housewarming present for the man Butz hopes will be his new boss. They’re already having a regular love-fest in the Chamber’s bed.

Why not take back ALL the Tourist Tax money? On June 6, 2005, Chamber Director **Linda Kuenzie** admitted that Rolla just didn’t have any tourism. That was when she said they were working on trying to define the word ‘tourism.’ The Great Tourism Masquerade is officially over. It was a mistake so let’s just admit it, cut our losses and move on. The Chamber got their 25-year pork contract to ‘develop’ tourism and create a convention business in Rolla but now that even they admit it isn’t possible to develop tourism in Rolla or have conventions, it’s time to quit pouring money down the Chamber drain. Why not cancel the contract and use the money for something that will benefit the people of Rolla. That ‘something’ would NOT be spending \$511,000 on the Forestry property and pretending it’s a public park.

ALL the Motel Tax money should be used for our existing parks – the ones that have been waiting for a park bench or swing set for decades – but not on the 42.23 acres of parks the council just bought as a parting gift for Joe. Last come, last developed.

Councilman Magdits is right, if we don’t need a park where Buehler Park is now, then we don’t need a park across the street either. The Mayor said Buehler Park was just a “restpit” and never used so why pay \$511,000 for another “restpit” across the street that also won’t be used except in the fevered imaginations of Butz, Morgan and Jenks? Let’s do what the “staff recommendations” never do and look at both the council’s choices:

Choice #1: City Council *doesn’t* buy the Forestry Land. The Forestry Service will take the land back and they will pay to maintain it as they always did before. It will still be a so-called public park but won’t cost the city anything. It will still have “nice” little walking paths but anyone who falls off the cliff and crashes into the Sirloin Stockade’s trash cans won’t be suing the city.

The Forestry Service might want to buy the Tourism building which was foolishly built on land the city/Chamber didn’t own or they might not. If they don’t, just close it down and write it off as a mistake along with the rest of the \$1.5 million spent on “tourism.” What will happen to the Chamber of Decorators? Who cares? They’re not part of the city and they’re not the taxpayer’s responsibility. They can either pay to rent their office from the Forestry Service or the city or whoever winds up with it, or they can move out and start earning their keep. Choice #1 costs the city nothing.

Choice #2 – City Council *does* buy the Forestry Land. The city spends \$511,000 to buy the Forestry property. They tell people it’s a public park but everyone knows that’s a lie. Then, secretly, they will start spending \$250,000 to “improve” it so it will be a much nicer “nice park, particularly for walking” which will make Jenks and his Chamber happy. Butz can start spending the \$250,000 right away on the property *because the council already approved that expenditure*. The area is so out of sight no one will see the taxpayers’ \$250,000 being wasted on the Chamber instead of the neglected parks in their neighborhoods. The city will have another “park” to mow and maintain as well as several aging Forestry buildings and a historic site to pay to preserve and the city will have to pay the utilities, insurance and upkeep on them all of which will increase the deficit in the Park budget. Anyone who wanders off the “nice” walking path and falls off the cliff onto the Sirloin Stockade’s dumpsters will sue the city. Choice #2 is very, very expensive for the city but the Chamber will be happy.

As a bonus for picking door #2, the public will see their elected representatives once again catering to another bunch of spoiled elitists and they won’t be happy. Maybe they will even remember this Chamber bail-out when the city asks them to vote to raise the sales tax for a permanent subsidy for the Rec Center. Those are the council’s two choices. They can screw the Chamber or screw the voters.

It’s time to screw the Chamber. City taxpayers don’t owe the Chamber a thing. What does the Chamber do for us that justifies giving them \$230,000 a year to spend on Chamber parties and a \$511,000 “park” with \$250,000 in improvements? The Chamber of Commerce is supposed to be an independent private non profit corporation organized to help the businesses of Rolla. Oh sure, they also claim to be ‘doing’ economic

development but everybody claims that these days – it’s so very fashionable. Here’s how the Chamber salutes the economic development flag. They’re a voting member of RREC, the mother of TIF I and TIF II. Their unthinking support of TIF is a symptom of the Chamber’s loss of purpose. TIF directly threatens the survival of many of their long-time small business members – members they’re supposed to protect.

The Chamber is silent while local contractors – their own members - have to beat back outrageous city fee increases. The Chamber says nothing while the city gouges their member businesses utility rates for a 5% city tax which is raising the cost of operation for Rolla’s small businesses to the breaking point. The Chamber makes no protest when the council talks about another sales tax increase which will make local retail merchants uncompetitive. (For only \$150 a year the Chamber will stab you in the back. For \$250 they’ll arrange to bankrupt you.) The weak and muzzled Chamber doesn’t even protest raising fees for little kids to play summer ball. As a reward for being City Hall’s lapdog we should give them \$761,000 to have an office on what would become city property, paid for with city taxes, developed with city taxes and maintained FOREVER with city taxes? No way.

How the Chamber became City Hall’s Poodle. Some of us can remember a time long ago, before the Chamber sold out for an annual \$230,000 Tourism Tax welfare check from the city, when the Chamber used to fight City Hall to keep taxes down and keep city bureaucrats and their rules and fees and taxes off the backs of small businesses in Rolla. Today’s Chamber doesn’t have the guts to do that. Under the dictatorial, blustering leadership of former **Chamber Director Ed Owsley**, they sold out for political gain. It was Ed Owsley who turned the Rolla Chamber of Commerce into City Hall’s poodle. They lost their virginity when they asked for a city handout in the guise of “creating tourism” when everyone knew Rolla has nothing to tour. Now, tamed and well-fed, they dare not bite the hand that feeds them.

Ed wanted to be the little ‘Boss Tweed’ of Rolla; the Chamber was to be his power base. He wanted to have an

impressive office and staff, money and power. He saw himself sitting at the center of his Chamber/RCDC Empire pulling the political strings of the community while the city council and the taxpayers danced to his tune. In his time Owsley stage-managed most of RCDC’s rip-offs of city property and money as well as engineering the Motel Tax/Tourism contract with the city. But just as Ed was about to get his little kingdom all put together, the Chamber Board, in their last and final independent act, threw him out. Three or four unsuccessful Chamber “decorators” later (our personal favorite was the one that ran off with the defrocked Episcopal priest) they plan parties and have luncheons.

Ed Owsley’s legacy (documented in the NSN series, “*The Black Hole*”) is the RCDC industrial development land and money grab and a weak Chamber with a Tourism building squatting on someone else’s land. Ed left a private corporate organization dependent on taxpayer charity to pay for a lifestyle that now is little more than planning progressive dinners, golf tournaments and wasting money on a dead downtown that persists in staying dead.

Without this city bail-out the Chamber may be out on their big soft not-used-to-working behinds. The \$511,000 would be better spent and would be of more benefit to the community if the council just gave the money over the next 20 years to the **Senior Center** or the **Rolla Public Library** or both.

“Mr. Porn” says it’s just a convenience store. RDN Editor **Janese Heavin** followed up with a story about **Mr. Brink** the owner of adult book stores in Arnold and Bridgeton, Missouri. Mr. Brink is the Christ Community Church’s new neighbor at the old Barnes truck stop at the I-44 and Hy. V Interchange. Heavin discovered something interesting. The City of Collinsville, Illinois fought Mr. Brink’s attempt to put one of his adult book stores in their community. They fought him all the way to federal court and they won! The people of Collinsville refused to sell out their community values for a few tax dollars. The Collinsville Community Development Director called Brink, “Mr. Porn.” Our Community Development Director would call him “My Good Ole Buddy.”

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