

No Standing News

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

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What is it about “No” Morgan doesn’t understand?

Mayoral candidate and RDN editor banned from Morgan-Butz meeting. Despite the 7-4 vote against the TIF Plan at the February 6, 2006 council meeting, Butz and Morgan never take a majority council NO for an answer if it denies them something they want. The council’s TIF-killing vote was barely 48 hours old when **Mayor Morgan** and **City Administrator John Butz** went ahead with their Wednesday meeting with the Williams Road residents to see if they could get some options to purchase their land as if the council hadn’t voted TIF down on Monday. They went ahead with their meeting because in their minds a majority vote of the council doesn’t matter it – it’s what they want that counts.

Morgan has done these heel-drumming tantrums on every issue where the council didn’t agree with him. Morgan does it because he doesn’t like democracy. He told us shortly after he took office that he viewed the council as his “Board of Directors” which made him the Chairman of the Board of the Morgan City Corporation. People were not welcome to speak at his private corporate board meetings. To make sure they did it as little as possible he imposed the Morgan Anti-Free Speech Rules that are printed at the top of each council agenda. The twelve ‘board’ members could ‘advise’ him but then he and Butz would go ahead and do whatever they wanted with the Morgan Corporation – and they have.

Is City Government LD?

Why can’t they...don’t they...won’t they...learn from their own history? It’s not good enough to say TIF is dead and there won’t be any more TIF projects in Rolla because no one can guarantee that. The only way to avoid making another TIF-type mistake – and we have had too many TIF-type mistakes before TIF - is to understand why these things keep happening. This one happened because the council members embarked on the biggest, most drastic, we-know-best-government-nannyism project in Rolla’s history *without doing the necessary research first*. They didn’t read the TIF statutes for themselves and they didn’t carefully examine what they were agreeing to do in any of the TIF I Plans or contracts. This is the mistake they make over and over. All someone has to do is slap an “Economic Development” label on a spending proposal and they’re ready to vote, no questions asked, no answers needed, throw caution to the winds, nothing can possibly go wrong.

They carelessly voted the first TIF Resolution in perfect ignorance of what Tax Increment Financing really was, how it would work, what they were committing to do, what it would do to others, and the financial liabilities TIF Bonds would hang around the necks of city taxpayers. What they began in ignorance they continued to do in ignorance. They took the first careless TIF vote over three years ago at the urging of **Bill Marshall, President of RREC**, (Rolla

In the Fascist world of the ‘bizness’ dominated Morgan Corporation, a majority vote of the council means nothing. That’s why we’ve had years of deficit budgets, lawsuits and failed ‘bizness’ schemes. The only things he was successful in doing was to get the council to appropriate the money to build a \$3 million road to his subdivision, build him a 7-foot fence for \$24,721, buy 2 acres from him for \$29,126 and spend \$436,037 for a 42.23 acre “public” park next to his subdivision. Being Mayor really paid off big time for Morgan but in getting big slabs of pork for himself he has left a path of financial destruction in his wake. We spent **\$3,489,885.82** on him but all we got was an ugly fountain...and it doesn’t work.

Mayoral Candidate Tom Sager was invited to go to the meeting with Williams Road resident **Robert Fleming**. When they arrived **Mayor Joe Morgan** threw them out saying it was a private meeting - a “private” meeting to discuss spending public money! **RDN editor Janese Heavin** was also barred from the meeting. Morgan should have learned by now that when he stomps on that particular member of the press she just calls up council members to get quotes for another article. In her follow-up article not only council members said TIF was dead but so did all three mayoral candidates, **Gary Hicks, Tom Sager** and **Bill Jenks**.

banker and resident of St. James who voted against TIF I the first time when *he* finally realized what it would do). **Morgan, Butz** and **Petersen** then fed the council a biased and carefully edited “cheat-sheet,” so they wouldn’t have to read more than a page or two of over-simplified bullet points. This simplistic summary of TIF (we still have it) didn’t mention condemnation of property at all! It was easy, they were told, staff would take care of all the ‘details’ and paperwork so all the council would have to do is just vote on a few resolutions and plans put in front of them; have a token public hearing and a “Big Box” would materialize on that corner and start generating huge sales taxes within 24 months – how easy, a free lunch for the city. That fairy tale and the predictable “staff recommendation” from Butz and Petersen was all it took for the council to walk blindly into three years of grinding acrimony, lawsuits and public ill-will. When some, (like NSN) tried to tell them they would have to condemn private property, they scoffed and said we were just “naysayers” and against “progress.” We knew what TIF was and we knew they didn’t know.

Butz, Petersen and Morgan knew exactly how to manipulate the council. The more complex the issue is the more the council prefers to have the answers fed to them by their “staff experts” rather than do their own reading and their own thinking. They often say just that: “Well, I guess we just

have to rely on the experts.” They say it as if their ignorance is something to be proud of rather than something they should cure by use of a little effort. Did they learn anything after the first TIF failed? Did they say, “Stop! Before we do this again let’s study it carefully so we won’t make the same mistakes we made the last time.” No, they let their “expert staff” push them into TIF II by telling them they were going to be able to “get around” the prickly condemnation problem – which turned out to be a lie. The second time they did it the council was just as clueless about all the other problems with the TIF as they were the first time. They were well on their way to repeating the same mistakes - still voting based upon their staff-fed ignorance - when one new council member asked a question about TIF no one had asked before. **Councilman Gary Hicks** asked what TIF Bonds were. They were about to hear the answer to a question that should have been asked and examined carefully three years earlier.

Another TIF shoe drops. At the Rolla City Council meeting on January 2nd, the council learned that TIF bonds were their debt to the developer! What were these TIF Bonds? The council thought the only fly in the TIF ointment was condemnation. **Councilmember** and **Mayoral candidate Gary Hicks** had spotted one of the many still unexplored traps in TIF. He asked who was responsible for paying the bonds. The answer from the bond lawyer was that the *\$10 million in TIF Bonds are an IOU from the City of Rolla to Sansone!* If the \$21 million project didn’t produce enough sales and property taxes to pay its bills, the city would have to pay the developer the shortfall up to \$10,000,000! If the city didn’t have \$10,000,000 – and they wouldn’t have it – the taxpayers would have to pay whatever shortage there was in the city’s \$10 million TIF IOU to Sansone.

How could a \$10 million default happen? Easily, if the Big Box retailer went bankrupt, moved out, or couldn’t meet the inflated retail sales expectations the council naively believes are carved in stone. Any number of bad things can happen in the unpredictable world of retailing – a world the city council doesn’t understand and can’t control. What makes council members think they are so expert in business and economics that they can gamble millions on retailing and win?

There was a stunned silence from the council after the bond lawyer explained this \$10 million city liability. Were they stunned at the \$10,000,000 risk or stunned at their three-years of ignorance of the risk? The question hadn’t been asked when they approved the first TIF Bonds of \$15 million for Kaplan. How could they have gambled nearly half the city’s annual budget on a retail experiment and not been aware they were guaranteeing payment of millions to a private developer? Why were TIF Bonds only now being explained? Well, it wouldn’t have been explained even at this late date either if Hicks hadn’t been there this time to ask the question. Retiring **Councilmember Matt Williams** pointed out another big hole in TIF which also had never been adequately debated by the council or the public, that the “big box” Sansone claimed would be a Home Depot (or something) would just cannibalize sales taxes from Lowe’s, Wal-Mart and other Rolla businesses by shifting sales from one retailer to another. That’s a fact but one the TIF lovers don’t like so it has been dismissed. As Hicks pointed out we don’t need TIF because,

“Retail follows good money.” ‘Good money’ meaning new payrolls. We not only don’t have new payrolls, we’re losing the \$13.7 million annual payroll from the USGS.

If Butz and Morgan can find some way to soothe the condemnation nerves of at least two members of the council (**Barklage**, a consistent pro-TIF vote was absent last Monday) and get them to approve the TIF Plan there will be another TIF vote. If they succeed in reviving it there’s another rattlesnake hiding in the TIF Plan they don’t know about and will step on. This rattlesnake is **TDD**, a **Transportation Development District**. If they approve the TIF Plan they will have unwittingly taken the first step to approving the formation of a new TDD taxing district. Let’s hope **Councilman Hicks** or **‘Mayor’ Hicks** will be around to ask a question about TDD if, or when, Morgan and the RREC gang bully the council into reviving this or one of their other seventeen TIF projects.

This TIF may or may not be dead, but our real problem never goes away. How do we get our city council, who apparently suffers from a group learning disability, to start learning from their mistakes? How do we get them to start doing their homework first and quit plunging into one expensive project after another just because the “staff recommends” it? Saying, “I guess we have to trust the experts,” is a lazy cop-out. If they are going to cop-out, they at least shouldn’t be so smug about it.

“We come in peace, we come in peace” (shoot to kill, shoot to kill). A voter for the TIF project, **Councilman Monty Jordan**, thinks they can rescue the project by “draft[ing] an ordinance eliminating eminent domain use in this town under any circumstances.” That’s a silly idea and shows how little **Councilman Jordan** knows about state laws and the limitations of city ordinances. Handicapped like that, what would they do when they needed to condemn property for a truly necessary public right-of-way? But let’s suppose they did pass an ordinance swearing off condemnations just for TIF. Such an ordinance passed can also be repealed at any meeting in 30-seconds. The essence of such an ordinance – the council’s *promise* not to use a power that state law allows them to use regardless of what they might promise in a local ordinance - would depend on whether people can trust them to keep such a promise. Could anyone trust them not to pull out that state-granted condemnation power and use it later if they wanted to? This, remember, is the government that has broken the promise to keep **Buehler Park** a public park “FOREVER” isn’t it? That’s the problem with having no ethics, with breaking your promises to fill your purse. Later, when you really need people to trust your word, they won’t because you’ve already demonstrated that your word is worthless.

Wiggins’ wagging finger. It’s gone beyond just annoying to watch so it must be even worse to actually be the target of a public scolding by **Charlotte Wiggins**. Whenever her fellow council members don’t go along with something Councilmember Wiggins wants badly, she *demand*s they explain to her why they didn’t vote the way she wanted. She did it when they wouldn’t vote the way she wanted on the 5% RMU graft tax and she did it again after their last TIF-killing vote. What annoys us, and what should annoy them, isn’t just

that she treats her peers with contempt as if they are naughty little boys and girls who owe 'Teacher' an explanation, what annoys us is that they don't tell her to go to hell. Charlotte has no right to demand they account to her for how they vote and no right to shake her long accusatory finger in their faces - something else Charlotte does when Charlotte is displeased.

The Rolla Public Library - Victim of City Hall's real estate politics

The January 19, RDN headline said, "*Library fees going up; state cuts blamed.*" State cuts are not what ails the **Rolla Free Public Library**. True, the state took the little pittance that was supposed to go to public libraries so they can spend it on a sports stadium, but the state's miserly \$366 for the Rolla library wouldn't have paid one electric bill. It's City Hall's budget practices and their obsession with real estate development that's slowly starving the Rolla Free Public Library. The other thing that's hurting the library is the council-appointed library board - nine people who need to learn about politics (they have books on the subject) and start making a big noise to get their library taxes back.

The library lost some of their revenues when the city cancelled the city's personal property tax to bribe city voters to vote for a ½ ¢ sales tax for capital improvements. Until 1995, the city gave the library \$28,000 a year in-lieu of the personal property taxes the city had excused but in 1995, with no explanation, they just quit giving them the in-lieu-of-tax payments. The 9-member library board should have protested loudly and publicly then but they didn't. Every time the RCDC got a "charity" tax break on land and buildings the library lost money. Every time the city gave away decades of property taxes to businesses in the industrial park, the library lost more property tax revenue that ***Rolla voters had voted exclusively for the library and which the city council had no legal right to give away.*** The board said nothing. Unlike the city the library doesn't get any sales taxes, property taxes are the library's only source of revenue. They have to survive on their limited voter-approved library property taxes - the ones the city council keeps giving away *without consent of the library board*. The Park Board (when we had one) also had a special property tax and they would be in the same bad shape except that the city got rid of the legal Park Board 25 years ago. Because the council has pretended for 25 years that they're the Rolla Park Board they liberally subsidize the park system with sales taxes in amounts from \$250,000 to \$425,000 (this year's subsidy) depending on how they need to use the park system as cover for other political agendas such as buying the mayor a 42-acre park.

Due to this constant tax erosion, the Rolla Free Public Library operates on a shoestring budget of only **\$353,800** a year. It's one of only three city services left that doesn't charge city residents (rural residents are charged \$20) an additional fee to use the service. The city hasn't yet thought of adding a fee for reading books only because they don't think of the library at all. The library also doesn't get \$494,160 bail-outs like the council's pet squeaking wheel, the Rec Center. One reason they are overlooked by the mayor and council - even when they are trying to raise money for an expansion - is that the Library Board is much too polite and self-effacing. They don't spend more money than they have; they never ask the city for anything, they don't even protest getting their taxes ripped off; therefore, they are invisible to

The only people who do have a right to demand a reason for how they vote are the constituents who put them there.

Wiggins needs to quit treating her peers like she's going to send them to bed without supper and they need to quit being wimps and tell her where she can stick her long pointy finger.

the council. With City Hall, prudent use of your budget and turning the other cheek is a tactical mistake.

It wasn't enough to starve the library every time they thoughtlessly gave away library taxes, there was more. In 'reviving' downtown for the third time the Chamber and Butz planted his obnoxious bump-outs ("pedestrian visibility enhancements") in front of the library destroying three of the few parking spaces they had. The library board didn't protest. The Library Board was the only city board that wasn't represented on the large real estate dominated 2020 City Comprehensive Planning Committee. The library isn't listed or linked to the city web page. Get the picture? The Rolla Free Public Library is Rolla's orphan public service.

Time to change the tradition. It has been a tradition for the Rolla Library Board to keep a low profile and stay out the politics in the building behind them. Former **Rolla Librarian Leola Millar** started the practice to protect the library from the meddling of city politicians who tried to use the library for a political football. She took the library out of the city budget (not that they ever got much even in those days) and made do with a little one-mill (10¢) property tax. Back in those days we thought of the library as the "jewel" in our crown. Now that community values are measured by a commercial yardstick, they claim the "jewel" is Brewer Science. My, how our values have 'progressed.'

Leola made up for the slow-growth library budget with ideas, energy and her single-minded dedication to spreading literacy and literature to enrich people's lives. Her under-paid and over-worked staff was just as devoted. Encouraging learning, literacy and filling the library with children excited about reading was their delight and reward. We are very lucky to have had the same kind of librarians and library employees since then. But enriching people's lives is not what Rolla's government is about these days. It's about real estate; buying it, developing it, helping real estate developers develop it and giving it away to private corporations.

The library board's isolationist attitude must change because in Leola's day we didn't have TIF, Enterprise Zones, Chapter 100 and other property tax giveaways for anointed businesses and big corporate landowners. Suffering tax erosion in silence isn't noble - it's suicidal. City tax giveaways have steadily sucked tax revenues out of the library budget, all in the name of "Economic Development." How many more thoughtless tax erosion decisions can the Rolla Library stand? How many more will the board suffer in silence?

Rolla Librarian Cheryl Goltz and her staff still do an excellent job on an ever-thinner shoe-string, but it's time the nine members of the library board put down their teacups and started fighting to protect library revenues before they have to post a notice: "*Library open only on Monday,*

Wednesday and Friday due to tax giveaways.” What a lovely sign of Rolla’s “Progress” that will be.

They’re not asking for enough. This is all the Rolla Library Board wants from the council. **1.** Because ‘someone’ stopped their payments in 1995, they want the city council to reinstate the annual in-lieu-of *personal* property tax payments (\$35,000) as a *partial replacement* for the personal property taxes the city excused. **2.** Because it was the city’s decision to contract with the county to do their property tax collections the city makes the library pay \$18,400 to get their shrinking voter-approved property taxes collected. They want the city to absorb that cost for the library just like they do for the Park department.

That’s all the library board wants but that’s not all they *should* want. They should want 45% of the Tourist Tax to go to the public library. They should want 10% of the city’s 5% utility tax to go to the library. They should want the city to at least acknowledge their existence by listing the public library on the city web site. < <http://www.rollacity.org/>> They should want those stupid bump-outs removed. Most of all they should want the city council to respect the library for the cultural and economic asset that it is and *exclude them from any more of their 100% property tax giveaways.*

The **Friends of the Library** donate books to the library book sale every year because the library needs every extra dime they can get. Let’s all become “Friends of the Library” this year and ask the city mayoral and council candidates when they’re going to start treating our public library like the excellent community asset it is instead of the ‘orphan’ public service it has been. When the incumbent candidates protest there isn’t enough money in the budget to replace all of the library’s property taxes they’ve given away just remind them they always seem to find plenty of money for corporate welfare and mayoral pork. Perhaps they should think of the library as a **\$511,000** estate for the Chamber of Decorators or an **\$115,000** annual handout for the RREC or a **\$436,037** park for Morgan or a **\$3.5 million** renovation of city hall or a new truck “campus” for Hargis. It’s all in what you call it.

Promote Rolla tourism – hand out a bagel today. Just as the negotiations are going on to see if the city will buy the

Forestry property for the Chamber, **President Maria Kardon** came alone (no other Chamber board members came) to the Feb. 6, council meeting to give their quarterly report. As usual they claim to have handed out 23-33,000 brochures (av. 7-10 per person. You know, the ones we all pick off those racks at a pit stop and then pick up off the floor and throw away at the next pit stop). According to their report they’ve had 3,400 visitors at the Visitor Center this quarter, a figure we find curious. Their parking lot barely holds 10 cars. If that many people tried to park in that little lot there would be cars lined up all the way to Zeno’s with desperate tourists waiting to go to the potty and get their av. 7-10 brochures per person. We have long suspected that their huge head count isn’t from tourists who stumble onto the well-hidden Visitor Center but actually based on the number of people who pay the tax to get a motel room for the night and then drive on the next day.

The report says they have “promoted/sponsored” a number of events. They served coffee and bagels at the Teacher’s Conference; had a cookout, hosted a City Wide Christmas Open House, bought (more?) Christmas decorations, promoted the Chamber Bucks program, etc. They also found a leak in the roof and got new carpeting. Handing out bagels and new carpeting will surely put Rolla on the map.

Their 25-year contract with the city requires an annual audited report. The Chamber has been promising to produce an audited statement for years. They are said (by Butz) to be having financial problems and now can’t pay off the building this year as **Buz Harvey** told the council they were going to do. If they can’t finish the building payments until 2008, *that means the city council will have to make the first two years payments on the purchase of the Forestry property for them* (\$50,000) if the council does agree to buy the \$511,000 property. What has the Chamber been doing with their \$230,000 a year welfare check? The answer to that would be in an audited statement – the one they don’t have.

Kardon said the Chamber would like to meet with the city council to decide what they should do. Nine years after they’ve spent over a million dollars of public taxes – *now* they want to know what they should do? Okay, we have a suggestion...

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