

# No Standing News

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

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## Buying Corporate “Pork Parks”

**And they just keep on takin’.** The council never seems to catch on that when they let one corporate porker belly up to the public trough, they’re naturally going to be trampled by hogs. In most towns, *successful* people and *successful* corporations give their communities, parks, community centers, fountains, donations and other nice things but not in Rolla – here they take they don’t give. Maybe the key is in the word *successful*. In Rolla we have a 38-year history of corporate “taking.” The **Chamber, RCDC, RREC** and now **Terry Brewer** repeatedly demand we give them our property, our money and our services. They not only expect us to give them whatever they want but we must do it while believing – or going along with the pretense – that draining the public treasury for their latest fancy will provide us with some future economic benefit. If the alleged benefit never materializes we’re not supposed to point that out. The latest round of “taking” is about giving them publicly-funded private parks – Pork Parks in fact. The game they play on the council is: “Pretend-It’s-a Public-Park” if the council falls for it, they’ll pay for it.

In Rolla, if you want a playground in your private industrial park or want the city to pay \$436,037 to buy a 42 acre park next to your private subdivision or you want a park across the street from Buehler Park, you just *pretend* your publicly-funded playground will be a public park. The Chamber is using the “public benefit” pretense to get their Pork Park because without the pretense that the Forestry property will have some public benefit there is absolutely not one single justification whatsoever for spending \$761,000 of the taxpayers money to buy and develop 9 acres of land for the Chamber of Decorators, a non profit private corporation that already wastes \$220,000 a year playing “Let’s Pretend We’re Bringing Tourism to Rolla.” Because it looks like the Chamber will get a free park, RCDC wants one too.

For four decades the city council has been living in theological servitude to the RCDC “Church of Economic Development.” RCDC’s conditioning is so embedded that it seems never to occur to the council that after giving the RCDC millions in land and buildings and after giving the companies in the industrial park hundreds of thousands a year in property tax exemptions, the RCDC – not Rolla’s taxpayers – should pay for their own mowing, pay for their own park, pay for their own “improvements to the new Hy Point front entry” and their own maintenance. **HY POINT IS NOT CITY PROPERTY. IT’S RCDC’S PRIVATE PROPERTY.** Investing in Hy Point improvements is not the responsibility of Rolla taxpayers. It’s time to tell the “Me” generation to save their allowance and buy their own toys.

City government has become a cash-operated, special interest machine that wastes major time and money placating self-absorbed non profit corporations who pretend to operate in the public interest but who demand millions from the taxpayers - and for what? Their development results (if any) are minor, they refuse public accountability and the inflated price tags of their “public benefit” projects are bleeding us to death. The smart thing for the council to do is quit letting themselves be manipulated by these egocentric lobbyists into having special off-the-record meetings, the kind of meetings they aren’t willing to have with the constituents in their own wards. Why didn’t they make the **Chamber** board members, **Jim Sowers** and **Terry Brewer** come before the council at regular public televised meetings to tell us what justifies spending our money on their Pork Parks? Who are they to summon *our* officials to private meetings and enroll them as their personal advocates to get us to pay for things they want? If Sowers and Brewer had to show up and plead their case with taxpayers watching they’d choke on all that pork.

**Progress on Pork Park #1 for the Chamber.** To get their \$511,000 “public” park deal concluded, the Chamber had a special meeting with the Rolla City Council on Tuesday, May 9<sup>th</sup> at the Rec Center. **Chamber Director Linda Kuenzie** urged the council members to come spend a day volunteering at the Visitor Center. She’s sure if they do they’ll all have a closer “relationship.” Cum By Yah and all that. In response, **C. Magdits**, who chaired the meeting, asked her how many Chamber members had ever been to a city council meeting. That pretty much rained out the Campfire Girl thing she had going.

Under council questioning, Kuenzie could only give estimates of how much of the Chamber’s executive salaries and benefits they *might* be paying for out of the Tourism tax but she wasn’t really sure. It’s not that hard to get part of the answer from the required annual Chamber audit now that, after 13 years, the council finally has one. They have personnel expenses of **\$97,731** a year they’re charging to the Motel Tax Fund, that’s **42%** of the **\$216,979** in taxes they got last year and that doesn’t include the cost of “support expenses” or the new Tourism Director they’ve just hired. A little top-heavy on administrative costs aren’t they? Would you give money to an organization that spends half of your donation to spend the rest? They also gave away \$12,734 in 2004 and \$6,000 in ‘05 to the Community Partnership as “grants” but how does that bring in tourists?

Kuenzie revealed they’re planning a new “something,” (she didn’t want to say what it was) but said we

may not see any visible results from the “something” for two or three years. If four years and \$650,000 later they’ve failed again and the “something” still isn’t visible, do we get our money back?

What was painfully clear is that the Chamber is— in **Year 13** of their 25-year contract - still *trying* to justify their tax subsidy. Kuenzie admitted for the third time that they know Rolla doesn’t have anything to tour which is (naturally) why they’ve just hired an Executive Director of Tourism to help them plan to do the...a-h-h-h...something. You’ve gotta hand it to them. The Chamber board is really good at the pretending game. They *pretend* they’re developing tourism but 13 years later they confess they were only *pretending* all that time but they want more time and another city bail-out so they can *pretend* to do “something” else that may not be visible for several years to get more of what they keep admitting we never had any hope of getting in the first place.

What is the justification for spending more money on people who can’t manage a budget or produce any value from what they’re already getting? Is the council really going to make annual payments for the land, spend \$250,000 to develop it and pay the property upkeep for the next seven years out of the city’s general fund so the Chamber can continue to pay their top-heavy payroll and enjoy their new Pork Park? Should performance like this be rewarded with another \$731,000? We’d get more public benefit spending the \$731,000 on street and sewer repairs.

**RCDC lobbies for Pork Park #3.** With the Chamber example to encourage them, **Terry Brewer** and the **RCDC** summoned **Mayor Jenks** and **John Butz** to a meeting on May 21st at Brewer’s place. (Actually “his” building was provided by the taxpayers of Rolla with a \$14.3 million revenue bond issue giving him a low-fixed mortgage rate but they *pretend* the building belongs to the city so Terry doesn’t have to pay property taxes. This is what’s called a Pork Building) In this fine Pork Park they want they’ve planned a *big picnic pavilion, picnic tables, a soccer practice field, a softball practice field and a basketball court* all enclosed by a *landscaped walking trail with a rubberized surface*. How many city parks have all that?

The fact that plans for a “public” park on RCDC’s land in the industrial park and the Chamber’s “public” park are both included in the city’s official 10-year plan for *city park* improvements is a sly but effective psychological tactic. Once they’re included in some official city plan the council quits thinking about *IF* they should do it and they move right on to *how* to pay for it. It also seems to be irrelevant that the people who will use the proposed Hy Point “public park” will be the people who work at Hy Point and the majority of Hy Point employees don’t live (or pay taxes) in Rolla. Well nevermind, neither do the people they work for. What exactly is the justification – other than “we want it”- for spending city taxes on a playground for RCDC and Brewer? We can’t answer that essential question because we haven’t heard anyone on the council ask for any justification. The fact that RCDC and Brewer *want it* seems to be all the justification needed. They all confuse *desiring* with *deserving*.

**100% property tax exemptions weren’t enough?** Before the council discusses developing Pork Park #3 again let’s take a reality check. **1.** The city is trying to sell of one of Rolla’s most popular parks to pacify the Chamber. **2.** The Chamber wants them to spend \$761,000 to create a Chamber Pork Park across the street from the one they’re hell-bent on destroying. **3.** The council is now entertaining offers to sell off two neighborhood parks, **Penny Park** and **Highland Park** without telling the public why or how this serves the people in those neighborhoods. Clearly the trend is to sell off the parks in old neighborhoods so they can buy and build new parks for the upscale neighborhoods. **4.** They already have two or more new subdivision parks they say they can’t afford to develop. **5.** Last year they destroyed half of Ber Juan Park and Tory Park with the few soccer fields the town has but can’t afford to finish that project. **6.** This spring they secretly spent **\$436,037.86** buying 42.23 acres for Pork Park #2 next to Joe’s subdivision. They didn’t announce it and didn’t explain why they did it. **7.** Now the topic of council discussion is Pork Park #3 to ease Terry Brewer’s esthetic pain because he doesn’t like looking at RCDC’s weedy lots. He wants Rolla’s taxpayers, who have already provided him with a building, to give him a “public” park to go with it. What *we* would like is for Terry Brewer to keep the promise he made to get his Pork Building - *maintain 240 jobs* for the life of his \$14.3 million below-market rate loan. Terry broke his promise but the council has not revoked his tax abatements as required by the contract.

This elaborate playground would not just satisfy Terry, it would boost the \$25,000 per acre price for the rest of RCDC’s 40 acres. If they can find buyers RCDC stands to make over \$1,000,000 selling the land Rolla taxpayers gave them for \$1. That’s why RCDC is angling for the taxpayers to mow their grass, put in an elaborate park and improve the entrance to their private property – they hope it will help sell their overpriced land. As a certain council member is fond of saying, it’s a Win-Win situation. RCDC wins and Terry Brewer wins.

**Tax freeloaders don’t deserve more handouts.** Thanks to the Rolla City Council the business landowners at Hy Point *don’t pay property taxes on their land and buildings*. Our schools, county, city and the handicapped are missing hundreds of thousands of dollars annually in property taxes from the most expensive land in the city. It’s the height of pork-slobbering greed for the RCDC and the Hy Point “tenants” to demand a publicly-funded park when they don’t pay real estate property taxes. They don’t pay their library taxes and they don’t pay their park taxes but still they expect to be given a park.

How much are they not paying? Here’s what the **Phelps County Assessor’s** records says the two newest tax exempt occupants of the industrial park will cost us every year for the next 10 years: The **Mo Sci** property is assessed at **\$1,340,600** so they won’t pay any real estate taxes on their **\$438,990** taxable property until after 2015. The **Pepsi-Cola** property is assessed at **\$996,700** so they won’t pay any taxes on **\$303,260** of their taxable real estate until after 2014. Remember, this newest loss of **\$732,250** in total *taxable*

property is for only two businesses, just part of the total taxable value *not being collected* in the industrial park this year and every year. Briggs & Stratton isn't paying property taxes on a building with, what we estimate has an appraisal value of about \$32,250,000 because the building is "owned" by RCDC. In 1994, the city and RMU stole **\$2,250,000** from the taxpayers and utility rate payers to illegally give this multi-million dollar 'present' to RCDC. To top off the fraud, RCDC got a bogus "charity" tax exemption from the county,\* thus preserving their perfect record of getting millions while never paying a dime for anything. But too much is never enough for RCDC. They want the taxpayers to build them a private park, pay for a new sign and landscaped entrance because...well, just because.

(\*See: NSN 6/27/05 "Hy Point, the Black Hole of Tax Assessment" Part 2 for details of who did it and how.) [http://www.rollanet.org/~rwnash/nsn\\_02\\_28.pdf](http://www.rollanet.org/~rwnash/nsn_02_28.pdf)

(Note: The state school foundation payments are based on local property taxes *collected* so the tax loss to the school district is about double. The school board keeps whining about not having enough money. No wonder!)

**Failure to "groom."** During both May council meetings **C. Wiggins** pushed the "need" to finalize a contract with RCDC so the city could do their mowing and maintenance. Wiggins says that the city needs to do this to "*retain the tenants* out there." What? Are the "tenants" threatening to move out because RCDC is too cheap to hire one of Rolla's commercial mowing services? Following her lead, Butz began calling them "tenants" instead of property owners and he agreed with her theory that Rolla's "image" is suffering because the "tenants" aren't uniformly mowing their property all at the same time. (No joke, that's her complaint – non uniform mowing of grass on private property) Butz and Wiggins agreed that RCDC's industrial park doesn't have the desirable "park-like appearance" because it isn't "groomed" like our city parks. Oh the humanity! The "tenants" don't "groom" and mow in unison to create the correct "park-like" appearance. How can we bear such slovenly behavior in a heavy manufacturing industrial district way across the highway that no one can see?

Another reality check: The companies at Hy Point aren't "tenants" or renters, who will move in a huff because the landlord won't fix the plumbing. They each own their own property and RCDC owns all the rest. Thanks to the city council they aren't paying property taxes on their land and buildings, so why are the property owners at Hy Point suddenly being called "tenants" as if they're renting from the city and why is Wiggins implying they're all going to pack up and leave? Is this an attempt to hype these corporate pork projects into such a high-priority "tenant retention" crisis that the council will be stampeded into putting RCDC's "needs" right to the top of the capital improvement spending list ahead of maintenance in the six Rolla wards that has been put off for years and years and years?

Speaking of slovenly property that everyone *can* see, **C. Williams** again complained that rental properties all over town and some on Pine St. have tall weeds and trash. He

urged everyone to report all the slum lords who don't mow or "groom" their land. **C. Waterman** wants to have the trash collectors, cops and firemen start writing down and reporting all the slovenly landowners. Oh no. City employees should keep their attention on what they're hired to do. Fortunately the Police Chief, Fire Chief and Solid Waste manager are all smart enough ignore the suggestion that their employees double for the code enforcement staff the council is too stingy to hire. However, Butz unintentionally came up with the solution. He said all anyone has to do is call and report a weedy property. You don't even have to give your name and they'll send out an employee right out to ticket the offenders. **Brilliant! Everyone call City Hall at 364-5333 and turn in the RCDC!** Problem solved. Now why didn't Charlotte think of that?

**The "City of Rolla Landscaping Company" robs local businesses.** When the Rec Center was in the planning stage, **The Family Fitness** and **Vessell's Fitness Complex** protested having their own taxes used to set up a city-owned and operated fitness center in competition with private businesses. Mayor Morgan assured them the city wouldn't do it but he lied. When TIF was first proposed local businesses protested having their taxes used to subsidize their competition. The council did it anyway. City Administration (the Mayor and Butz) have for years covertly mowed the RCDC's grass and done their other maintenance work and even paid city employees double time to mow RCDC's property on a Sunday. City employees were used as RCDC's hired hands and local landscaping firms lost business. It's typically hypocritical for RCDC, the city's Welfare Kings, to get their land free and their yard work and landscaping done by the city on the cheap and tell us how devoted they are to creating jobs in Rolla.

In pursuit of economic development the city is getting into the habit of undercutting Rolla businesses, the people who do provide jobs and who would create more jobs if the city didn't keep kicking them in the teeth with tax-subsidized, city-owned "businesses." If the council thinks using public taxes to deprive local businesses of their customers is an appropriate role for city government then in all fairness they should announce this policy. Businesses would be warned and perhaps move to some other town that knows the difference between public and private business.

**Council sabotaged by bad staff work.** The words most frequently heard when either Hargis or Kwantes are asked by the council what is going on with some street or park project are: "Donno. Haven't been out there for awhile." Last year the whole east end of Ber Juan Park had been strip-mined but when the council asked what the hell was going on and what it cost, Kwantes couldn't answer because he "hadn't been out there for awhile." At the June 5 council meeting **C. Magdits** asked why there were dangerous open holes, open culverts and the road was still torn up at Southview Drive and Oak Knoll Road. He got the usual answer from Hargis, "Donno. Haven't been out there for awhile." Hargis and Kwantes are still getting an annual \$3,000 cash "car bonus" and they also have city vehicles to drive but apparently they don't use

either to check on the progress, or lack of progress, of their own public works projects. They're also never prepared to give detailed reports to the council. Why aren't all managers submitting updated progress reports at every council meeting on every city project? Who's responsible for this sloppy staff work? Administration is responsible and that's the mayor and the city administrator. Butz is supposed to be the chief manager who manages all the managers but three of his managers are clearly unmanageable. When they give "Donno" answers Butz says nothing like he doesn't know who those people are. At the first "donno" a good manager would have them out in the hall banging their heads against the wall. At the second "donno" they'd be fired. What kind of public accountability is this?

At the June 5, '06 council meeting **C. Charlotte Wiggins** asked **Mayor Jenks** for a report on his meeting with Terry and the RCDC. In discussing Pork Park #3, the council wound up looking clueless and confused...again. It's exactly what the council deserves for tolerating bad staff work. On Monday night they were torpedoed by staff again when **C. Magdits** asked a very logical question. He asked who owned the old lagoon where Terry and the RCDC want the city to build their park. **City Engineer Steve Hargis** said the city owned it but the fact is they don't. It's RCDC's private property. The city engineer maintains all the city maps, plats and land records so why doesn't he know what land belongs to the city? Again the council looked uninformed thanks to their seemingly unlimited tolerance for bad staff work. We

criticize the council members for not reading their materials, not asking questions and for accepting any staff recommendation, answer or opinion they get instead of making the staff prove what they say is true and accurate. The council is guilty of all that and they deserve the criticism but we can also see when it's not entirely their fault, when the staff is spitballing or making up answers because they know they can get away with "I donno."

It's not like this Hy Point Pork Park was a spur of the moment thing. The plans for both the Chamber and the Hy Point "parks" are drawn up in detail on pages 23 and 27 of the official city publication, *"An Investment in the Rolla Park System and Recreation Center"* December, 2005. This was *"Prepared and Produced by Department of Parks & Recreation and The Centre - Rolla's Health & Recreation Complex."* It contains blueprints, timelines, budgets and plans for passage of an increase in the sales tax to pay for the 10-year, \$1,765,000 development budget. The plan was done by **Hargis, Kwantes and Caron** and approved by the council *over a year ago*. With all the people involved in preparing this elaborate planning document don't you think one of them would have checked to make sure they actually owned the land in case they were given orders to start work immediately? No. Not in Rolla where "Donno, haven't been out there for awhile" is the standard of excellence.

Why does Rolla spend millions of dollars every year on 'progress' but never makes any? Gee, we "donno."

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