

No Standing News

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

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Desperately Seeking Sales Taxes

Ask any gambling addict. Just stake him to one more bet his luck will change and next stop - Easy Street. Like all habitual gamblers, Rolla's 'leaders' have found another sure-fire economic development idea. All we have to do is put up another stake of \$300,000 to \$400,000 for another roll of the dice and this time their luck will change. (Nobody's admitting TIF II is dead...but...) This time the deep thinkers in RREC are peddling a **Community Improvement (taxing) District (CID)*** to pay for running a three-lane highway bypass through Ridgeview Subdivision. They say it will only cost the taxpayers \$300,000 or more to get started on the \$35,000,000+ project. The \$300-\$400,000 is only for the initial studies and you can be sure all of the studies will say a three-lane road, a CID district and sales tax is the best thing since sliced bread. Consultants who don't tailor their conclusions to please the people who sign their checks aren't in the consulting business for long. The expensive studies will tell us how many homes in Ridgeview will have to be bulldozed and/or taken by eminent domain so MoDOT can put a 3-lane bypass through the subdivision that will reconnect to I-44 out past Blues Lake.

They claim the actual 'improvements' will cost \$35,000,000 but we think that is an old estimate leftover from the first Bulldoze-Ridgeview-Bypass-Plan some years ago that **Ed Owsley** and the Chamber tried to get rammed through when Ed wanted the bypass to come out by the Visitor Center. If you're thinking MoDOT is going to pay the whole \$35 million to put in the bypass - forget that. MoDOT may pay as little as 40% of this highway project but they're certainly not going to pay 100% of the cost for a bypass that takes the most expensive possible route through a congested subdivision when much cheaper bypass routes are available. The MoDOT people are cranky - not stupid.

How will this bypass be paid for? They plan to pay for it the usual way with more sales taxes, an additional **1/8 to 1¢ sales tax** that we will pay if we buy anything in the new CID district. Don't worry that having the highest sales tax rate in the Midwest will run people off. We already have the highest kilowatt rate in the Midwest (**10.1¢**) which is running people off before we've even got the highest sales taxes in the state. By the way, you'll have to read and listen carefully to decipher the code talk. They don't want to call this CID taxing district a CID taxing district. The coy description John Butz and Elizabeth Bax use is "overlay tax district" as if another sales tax "*overlaid*" on the rest of our taxes is somehow less painful than another sales tax *added* to the rest of our taxes. A distinction without a difference.

A CID taxing district can be almost any size and in this case they plan to encompass a huge area from

Kingshighway to way out past Blues Lake taking in both sides of I-44 which will capture all the businesses along Martin Springs Drive and those on the opposite side of the interstate. Butz and Petersen got the council's vote to start this early last year. They started the legal notices in the paper to do the voluntary annexation with MoDOT last month. The council has not actually voted yet to do any of the things Bax and Wiggins were cheerleading at the *un-televised special workshop* December 11, 2006. It wouldn't have been legal for them to take votes at that meeting unless they had advertised it as a special council meeting and posted an agenda saying they would have a public discussion and maybe take votes. No reporters from the 'news' paper showed up at either the December 11th or the November 27th special workshops even though they were discussing and tacitly deciding how they will later vote on two large tax issues. Since former RDN editor, **Janese Heavin**, left for a better job with the Columbia Tribune, the RDN teen reporters have reverted to their usual obliging practice of not showing up at 'certain' sensitive City Hall meetings. At both this meeting and the November 27th meeting (details next section) significant financial discussions were being discussed and formulated by our elected officials out of our sight, hearing and without even a token report by the 'news' paper. They didn't even bother to fake a 'news' story from a City Hall handout.

Where's the money coming from? Don't be silly, where does it usually come from? More sales taxes! The key to the whole CID tax scheme is a little Popsicle-like appendage hanging off one end of the proposed CID taxing district. The "pop" is **Wal-Mart** the CID's cash-cow. How could you engineer a tax-grab without including Wal-Mart? A new CID board of landowners only will be the only ones who will get to vote to raise the sales tax on everything sold at Wal-Mart and anywhere else within the district. The Board of CID landowners are the only "qualified" voters in a CID district. With either a CID or TDD (a Transportation Development District) we're back to the bad old days of the Poll Tax when only property owners had the right to vote to keep blacks and white trash sharecroppers from having a voice in their own government. TIF, TDD and CID laws were all designed by large corporate developers who don't like representative government. The powers of these quasi-governmental taxing districts are modeled generally on the only form of governance corporate oligarchs do like - Mussolini's Fascist governance system, and didn't that turn out well?

*(The CID laws and the powers of a CID board are contained in [RSMo. 67.1401-67.1571](#). Those whose homes are threatened or who think we don't need to raise taxes better

read it. Don't assume your council reps will read it because they don't do that sort of thing. They wait for Petersen or Butz to summarize the "good" parts for them in a one-page handout. Those of you who live outside the city - don't feel so smug. You'll be paying the new sales taxes too.)

The council has not actually voted to do any of the things Bax and Wiggins were cheerleading at the *un-televised special workshop* December 11, 2006. It wouldn't have been legal for them to take such a vote unless they had advertised it as a special council meeting and said they would have a public discussion of the CID district and the tax issue on the published agenda. It's amazing how tame the local reporters are in not showing up at certain City Hall meetings. At both this meeting and the November 27th meeting significant financial discussions were taking place by our elected officials out of our hearing but the 'news' paper didn't bother to cover the meetings. They didn't even bother to fake a 'news' report from a City Hall handout as they frequently do.

Good to know. "Quality of life is such an important issue." That's what Elizabeth Bax informed the Phelps County Commissioners on 1/10/07 while lobbying for then to throw in \$50,000 to the bypass studies. It's good that she points that out everywhere she does this dog and pony show because we're all such dumb hillbillies we hadn't figured out that quality of life is important. Was the RREC protecting Rolla's quality of life when they sat on their hands as RMU/MoPEP gave us the highest electric rates (**10.1¢**) in the state? If they value our quality of life why aren't they telling RMU to get out from under the MoPEP hyenas even if they do get sued? Why haven't Marshall, Bax and all the other RREC development geniuses told the council to reduce the 5% graft they skim off all our utility bills to improve our quality of life? The reason the RREC never speaks up to defend our 'quality of life' because the city's 5% back-door economic development tax is going to be the RREC's permanent cash-cow and the higher RMU's rates are the more will fall off the table for the RREC. See how well it works? RREC's survival depends on having the public subsidize their corporation and buy into and finance their "visionary" schemes such as TIF, the Expanded Enterprise Zone and now the CID. It's easy for Bax to overlook the burdensome taxes and fees that are destroying our 'quality of life' because she lives in Jeff City. Most of the board members of the RREC, RCDC and the Chamber don't live in Rolla either. The out-of-towners who think up these schemes are not exactly sharing our day-to-day tax pain are they?

Wiggins in charge of "Our Shared Vision." At the December 11th special (un-televised) council workshop on "*Development of a Shared Vision for the Northwest Corridor*" facilitated by **Charlotte Wiggins**, they divvied up the tasks. **Steve Hargis** advised them to begin the process by discussing it with the "big players." The "Big Players?" Butz is hunting through the budget for way to cut our public services to come up with the \$300,000 they need for the startup costs for their new play project, thus the pitch to the

county by **Bax, Butz, Jenks and Hargis**. Their request for \$50,000 from the county came at the same time as **Phelps County Clerk Carol Bennett** was making slashing cuts in the county budget. The RREC Visionaries are already trying out slogans, (one can't have a proper tax campaign without one's slogan). At the moment it's called "Partners for Progress." Not too original but they couldn't very well call it "Partners in another TIF-type Gamble We Don't Know a Thing About." Brace yourself to hear a lot about partnerships, shared visions, win-win situations and other corporate jargon. Bax and Wiggins both love that motivational management crap.

"A Tale of Two Cities - Rolla reestablishes itself as the natural crossroads and center of commerce." No, we didn't make that up (snicker) it's how the RREC titled their presentation to the county. In this RREC position paper we are warned that we must follow the RREC without question on this project because, "Failure to do so will ultimately result in continued erosion of the ability of the city and county to support basic services." You mean...if we don't keep doing what we've been doing, (and doing it has nearly bankrupted the city) and if we don't do even more of it, we will be worse off than we already are from doing what they wanted us to do before that already didn't work?

The recipe for how we are to "reestablish ourselves" is laid out in a two-page "We Do/We Don't" matrix with the dire consequences spelled out in neat little boxes. The boxes tell us what "We Do" to avoid the horrible consequences of what will surely happen if "We Don't" do all the things in the "We Do" boxes. For instance, one of the boxes of "We Do" things we must do is, "*We attract additional amenities and venues for entertainment. We grow our economy. We accumulate the critical mass needed to spur new investment. We grow our sales tax revenues.*" The RREC says if we don't do the "We Do's" these are just some of the "We Don'ts" that will surely result from not doing the "We Do's." "*We see a decline in our wealth, our influence and our quality of life. Our major employers have difficulty hiring. This is especially detrimental to the Hospital. North Rolla remains an afterthought.*" North Rolla remains an afterthought? Oh, the horror! Oh, the humanity!

"We grow our economy...we grow our tax revenues?" Oh please! Spare us the lousy grammar and tired clichés used by all desperate bureaucrats. RREC's "The Tale of Two Cities" paper is full of this kind of condescending jargon somebody cribbed from a handout at a state economic development workshop and it's insulting. Who on the RREC board thought this patronizing drivel was a convincing sales tool? Even more insulting is the arrogant assumption that we are all dumb enough to swallow their exaggerated 'facts' and disaster scenarios. Just because *they say* a bypass funded by a CID sales tax is our last hope, just because *they claim* Rolla will be 'saved' by tax-subsidized retailing projects, just because *they believe* that mega-million dollar Big Box construction projects are the be-all and end-all of economic development doesn't mean there is a word of truth to any of it. How many times have they used disaster scenarios to bully us into giving away millions in land, buildings and property

taxes? They've cried certain doom if we didn't have a regional jail, regional landfill, the Rec Center and both TIF projects. As a result we've wasted money on one copy-cat economic development project after another during the last four decades and they've all failed because our 'leaders' don't

think for themselves, they just copy whatever fad the Missouri Department of Economic Development is selling this year. The exaggerated gas-baggery in this pitch piece has all the earmarks of DED propaganda.

And the other sales tax hike will be...

At yet another special un-televised city council tax-hiking 'workshop,' this one back in November 27, **Mayor Jenks** and **Butz** proposed to the council that the "temporary" recreation sales tax be made permanent so the taxpayers won't get the tax break they were promised. In 2014 we are supposed to pay off the \$11.7 million in Rec Center bonds and then – we were promised – the *temporary* ½ cent sales tax would expire thus giving us a much needed tax break. If we vote to make this temporary tax permanent, Mayor Jenks and Butz will have about \$1.5 million in extra tax revenue to keep annually subsidizing the Rec Center. They will also have the extra revenue to build the \$250,000 private park they promised the Chamber of Decorators (they do keep their promises to the Chamber) that's after they pay \$511,000 for the Chamber's private 9.4 acre park. Well, after all there's no point in being the "Big Players" unless you get the Big Pork.

The Recreation Center, you remember, was also pitched as a "Big Vision" that would attract thousands of people from miles around who would be so impressed they would just pack up and move all their factories and businesses here to get to swim every day. We had to have "Big Amenities" to go with our "Big Visions." The recreation consultants we paid for naturally said it was the greatest idea since sliced bread which is exactly what they told every other town where they sold these multi-million dollar recreational white elephants. None of the claims that this would be an economic development "magnet" was accompanied by a single sentence of objective fact it was just the usual pie-in-the-sky development hype. Everybody made money off of us on this one, even **Councilman Charlotte Wiggins** and **Annie Bass** who were paid to market it in the region – another waste of money. Those of us who said it was just consultant's self-serving hype, that it was overbuilt and would never cash-flow were called "nay-sayers" and "anti-progress." We were right – they were wrong.

The real reason we wound up with this expensive albatross is because the country clubbers – most of whom live out in the county – were too cheap or too broke to pony up the money to rebuild the smelly, run-down club facilities at Oak Meadow Country Club into the ritzy sports palace they felt they deserved. What a swell idea to have Rolla voters build a new country club-type sports facility in town complete with country club prices to keep out the riff-raff who would never get to use it but would nevertheless have to pay for it. In the last four years the overbuilt center has had to be subsidized (by the riff-raff who are still paying for it) to the tune of nearly \$900,000. Meanwhile, the few toilets we have in our old parks are locked and/or reeking so badly no one can use them...but then we aren't the "Big Players" we're just the riff-raff who pay for all the nice perks the "Big Players"

get.

They love literacy, they just hate libraries. At the November 27th workshop where Jenks and the council were planning how to spend the money they will get if they can get the voters to make the *temporary* recreation ½ cent sales tax a *permanent* sales tax, not a single word was said about dedicating some small part of the million plus dollars a year to help the Rolla library with their expansion plans nor was there any discussion of providing an annual supplement to the library's small tax revenues to supply the new expanded Children's Library with books and equipment. Giving the Chamber of Decorators an annual income to hand out brochures and maintain a public potty is, they claim, important to us because.....well, it just is because the Chamber says it is. Using some of our taxes to help the public library buy books for children is...well, that's different and not so important.

The Mayor and Council don't like reading, that's quite obvious from all the contracts and other documents they don't read before they vote but what do they have against those who enjoy reading as recreation? Even if they discount the library as a form of recreation, (and they do because it's not a sweaty jock sport like the ones at the Rec Center) you'd think they would at least value the Rolla Free Public Library as a sales asset – one of those "quality of life" things to list when trolling for Big Boxes and Quick Marts. It's interesting that Bax and the RREC never list our public library as one of Rolla's great 'quality of life' amenities even though the library has more users than the Rec Center. Why is the Chamber always at the head of the line but the Library isn't even in the line?

A quarter of a million dollars to build the Chamber a park; a quarter of a million dollars every year to bail-out the Jock Palace, a quarter of a million dollars to buy the Aaron building, more than a quarter of a million dollars for consultants to make guesses about the wholly speculative 5th Interchange project, but not one dime for the modest expansion plans for our public library. And people ask what's wrong with Rolla?

Chamber of Decorators gets new contract. After many hours of committee meetings, the Chamber of Decorators got a contract for 2 years instead of 25 years to continue to get their welfare handouts from the city tourism tax. They still get to take 90% of all motel taxes collected and, according to **Buz Harvey**, the council should be grateful the Chamber *allows* them have their little 10% administration fee. Led by **Councilmember Lou Magdits** the council negotiating committee put their foot down and insisted on having stronger

“benchmarks” so the council can judge whether the Chamber is making good use of this public money. The benchmarks the Chamber wants are the following; **1.** how much money is generated by the tax (everyone is supposed to pretend that a multitude of national economic factors including the price of gasoline and increases in the price of motel rooms have nothing to do with an increase in the tax revenues, everyone will pretend the increases are solely due to Chamber's marketing genius), **2.** how many local people volunteer to hand out brochures at the Visitor Center (the Buz Harvey theory is that this volunteerism shows...well it shows something. No one can follow his rants.) and, **3.** how many clicks they get on the Chamber's Rolla Tourism web page. There is one problem here, first they have to make up a Tourism web page. The Chamber has only been taking money to do this since 1995 so it should be ready any day now. Second, they have to set up a Covert Chamber Web Counter Clicking Committee to log onto the web site several times a day to make sure they have plenty of benchmark clicks to report to the council. Notice that none of the criteria have anything at all to do with bringing even one tourist to town.

C. Charlotte Wiggins and C. Magdits didn't think these 'benchmarks' were quite rigorous enough (you think?) so they will give the Chamber until March to come up with something better. We agree they overlooked some important "benchmark" indicators. For instance, would it be too cruel to make them guess, **4.** How many jellybeans are in the jar, or **5.** How many times someone will spit on Pine Street?

Obviously the so-called "benchmark" criteria is nothing but a sham proposed by Chamber members who either know they can't meet even the lowest standard of performance (because they've been giving the lowest performance for the last 11 years) or who are so inept they

actually think those are high standards. But that wasn't really the point of this elaborate contract revision exercise. The point was for the council to appear to be exercising some oversight over the city's annual pork payments to the Chamber to quiet all the taxpayers who have been expressing their disgust at carrying this bunch of overfed divas and do-nothings on the public payroll. Even in The Outlaw City of the Ozarks you can't waste 2.5 million dollars of the public's money without attracting some backlash.

Were we wrong? We may have been wrong in saying that if the city buys the Forestry property they will be paying twice for the Visitor's Center. It's hard to be 100% accurate about what's going on in city hall when they are so paranoid and secretive that they bolt into closed sessions to decide what cleaning supplies to buy. To find out if we were wrong and if we needed to correct our statement we have been trying to get documentation from **Director Ronnie Rahm** and his staff at the Mark Twain Forestry office. The MTF is a part of our large federal government bureaucracy. We have made three different requests for documents and each time the Sunshine/FOIA requests were ignored (lost they said) and not answered for over 20 days. The appraisals have just arrived and we'll let you know what they say. Meanwhile if you want information from the FS plan on lead time of about a month. For a federal agency they have amazingly bad luck with their mail.

Lowe's coming to St. Robert. The RDN didn't print the announcement but Lowe's is putting in a store in St. Robert. That's part of the reason the RREC and City Hall are in such a panic that they're proposing driving highways through people's living rooms.

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