

No Standing News

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

Volume I

Number 06

August 17, 1998

LETTER BY COUNCILMAN DEFRIESE

In the July 8, 1998 edition of the Rolla Daily News, Mr. Steve Sowers published an editorial entitled, "Taking the Bond Money is Good Financial Stewardship". The "money" that Mr. Sowers is referring to is the \$40,000 injunction bond posted by the Citizens For Preservation of Buehler Park.

Brian DeFriese, Ward 5 Councilman, responded to the editorial with a letter-to-the-editor. To date, the letter has not been published. Since the original date of the letter, Mr. DeFriese uncovered more unsettling information, and has included this information as well. No Standing News found Mr. DeFriese's letter to be an excellent response to Mr. Sower's editorial, and would like to pass it on to it's subscribers:

Dear Editor,

I read your editorial in the opinion page on July 8, 1998, and find it somewhat frightening that we actually agree on something.

It is the sworn duty of anyone elected to public office to ensure that taxpayer funds are put to the most effective and prudent use, so as to provide benefits to everyone in the community, not just our "buddies", myself included. Unfortunately, this is where our agreement seems to stop, as I simply can't understand how you deem it "good financial

stewardship" to pursue the entire \$40,000 bond that was put up by the Buehler Park group.

It has been stated that the bond is being sought to recoup the losses incurred by the City, and I have to ask exactly which losses you mean. The City still retains the Buehler Park property, and if they were to choose to sell the park, I'm sure it would bring more than the original \$500,000 asking price.

There is also the assumed loss of utility sales, property and sales tax, and other costs related to running a business. While we can all guess at what these losses might be, neither you nor I can produce a dollar amount in cold-hard figures. We can only assume what these losses would be.

Finally, the City did incur some legal expenses which totaled approximately \$5000.

In hindsight, one must ask a question: If the City had kept this deal open, and informed the public throughout, would this matter have ever ended up in court? I don't think so, as I believe the deal would have fallen apart long before it went as far as it did. Don't forget the poll that your own newspaper conducted, which showed that 76% of the respondents were against the sale (RDN, Sunday, Nov. 17, 1996). The City is seeking \$40,000 to cover an actual loss of \$5,000. Whether or not this is "good financial stewardship" or not is a matter of opinion, I suppose. To me, it seems nothing more than an attempt to punish those who dared to stand up to City Hall and fight for what they believe in.

While we are discussing "good financial stewardship", I would like to address a couple more points. The audit conducted by the State Auditor's Office pointed out that over a period of about two years, our former City Administrator took a little over \$25,000 in questionable or unauthorized reimbursements. Would it not be "good financial stewardship" to recoup this money from Mr. Strouse? Alas! We can't do that! He's one of our "buddies". Besides, Mayor Morgan stated during his campaign, "I don't think that there were any significant findings in the audit that justify the \$19,000 (cost of the audit)". (Channel 16 Mayoral Forum, March 31, 1998)

We have also failed to discuss the Phelps County Bank parking lot deal that was approved earlier this year. Prior to and throughout the construction of the new PCB downtown drive-thru, the bank stated that they were going to build the parking lot at the end of their building (RDN April 16, 1997). However, when the time came to pave, they decided to let the City build it with taxpayer funds, and gave us a ten-year lease, after which they can reclaim the land and have a parking lot at substantial savings.

Whether or not the additional parking is needed is a matter of opinion, but with the lot containing some parking spaces restricted to thirty minutes, we can all figure out who the prime beneficiary is. You can call this "good financial stewardship" if you want, but I choose to call it "poor public policy".

Finally, I would like to share information about a very recent development. Mayor Morgan and his "buddy" Buz Harvey have been discussing making the Visitors' Center a city park. Our Mayor has had City engineering staff draw plans and spend man hours (and your tax dollars) developing a site plan for a park near the Visitors' Center (I have a copy of the site plan if you would like to see it). This idea has not yet been presented to the City Council, but would also require that the City buy the land that the Chamber of Commerce offices and

Visitors' Center sit on. Call this idea "good financial stewardship" if you want, but it is clear that the Chamber will be the main beneficiary if this deal is done. Once again, the City would be using taxpayers' money to benefit a private organization. I guess that's okay, though, since they, too, are our "buddies".

During his campaign for Mayor, Joe Morgan stated that Buehler Park was unsafe and a new park was needed (Mayoral Forum, Channel 16, March 31, 1998). Why, then would we choose to build one across the street at a location that definitely won't be safe once the Missouri Department of Transportation extends Highway 72 to Bridge School Road? Is this "good financial stewardship" or simply an attempt to help our "buddies"?

Personally, I don't feel that Buehler Park is unsafe, and would challenge anyone to prove otherwise. I have checked back at least 10 years and find no record of any child being injured, other than the occasional scraped knee that occurs when kids are playing at any park.

If I am mistaken, then I'll be more than willing to admit it, but I have researched these facts closely. Hey, I'm from Missouri, after all, so I guess you'll just have to show me!

Thank you for your time.

Brian E. DeFriese
Councilman, Ward 5

Views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of No Standing News, nor of its Editor-in-Chief.

To receive " No Standing News " by e-mail, free of charge, send a message to rwnash@rollanet.org with the word SUBSCRIBE in the Subject line.

To unsubscribe this list, send a message to
rwnash@rollanet.org with the word
UNSUBSCRIBE in the Subject line.

Editors note: Copies of No Standing News can be
obtained from the Rolla Public Library who is a
subscriber. Also see our web site at:
<http://www.rollanet.org/~rwnash/nsn.html>

I encourage distribution of " No Standing News
."Please feel free to copy and distribute any issue.