

No Standing News

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

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NSN Special: COUNCIL CHRONICLES

By Lois Ann Marler

The September meeting of the Rolla City Council was a relatively short one, but was full of points of interest. Highlighting the night was a presentation by Mayor Joe Morgan, outlining a plan to purchase a 10-acre tract of land currently owned by the U.S. Forest Service. According to Morgan, funds to purchase the current home of the Visitors' Center and surrounding acreage would be derived from the sale of Buehler Park. Morgan claims that he has been working on the project for the past 30 days. However, No Standing News was the first and only news provider to report a meeting between Mr. Morgan, city administrator John Butz, and Buz Harvey, Chairman of the Board for the Chamber of Commerce that occurred prior to July 9, 1998. Their discussion centered around this 10-acre tract and their expediency to purchase it.

Morgan explained that the funds from the sale of Buehler Park would not only purchase the land, but would go toward the development of a park on the south end of the property, an additional \$200,000 project. Any leftover funds would be used to purchase a parcel of land in the newly annexed area for park purposes.

Councilman Brian DeFriese was the only member of council to ask questions of the mayor. He had a copy of a map from the Route 63 Corridor Study,

which showed TWO Buehler Parks: one labeled "existing", and another labeled "proposed". As you might guess, the "proposed" Buehler Park was located on the Forestry Service land. Mr. DeFriese also pointed out names of city employees/officials who were on the Corridor committee: Ken Kwantes, Parks Director; Steve Hargis, Public Works Director; Ed Owsley, councilman. Also mentioned was Chamber President, Don Johnson. He pointed out that these people must have been privy to these plans prior to Tuesday night.

Mayor Morgan entertained questions from the audience, noting that "discussion" would have to wait until next month. The remaining 11 council members were unusually quiet through discussion of the matter.

Later in the evening, during closed session, the council considered an unsolicited offer for Buehler Park and unanimously rejected it. It is evident that since the park was once "nearly sold", there is now a string a potential buyers with "cash-in-hand", eager to rid the city of their "commercial" property.

NO LAND FOR THE REC CENTER?

"If you're going to do this to me now, I feel kind of betrayed", was the response of one council member upon learning that replacement land must be purchased to replace land used to build a REC Center in Ber Juan Park. Most of the council admitted they knew nothing about this particular stipulation attached to Ber Juan Park.

Ber Juan Park was developed with a "Land and Water Conservation Fund" grant, and thus has to meet certain terms when using the property for

other than outdoor use. The city must submit a request to the U.S. Department of Interior, through the Outdoor Recreation Assistance Program (ORAP), explaining why they are converting the land, identifying replacement property, and a host of other requirements, including a survey by a qualified archaeologist prior to the conversion. The process takes 4-6 months, according to Parks and Recreation Director Ken Kwantes. Current undeveloped city-owned park land does not qualify for the conversion. Councilmen Barklage and Magdits, both members of the REC Plex Ad Hoc Committee said that they didn't see this as any great obstacle.

REC PLEX AD HOC COMMITTEE

The scales are anything but balanced in the newly restructured REC Plex Ad Hoc Committee. Along with the three council members who served on the committee prior to the election, the Mayor appointed TWO more council members, City Administrator John Butz, himself, Bill Moorkamp, and Ken Kwantes. The only person who isn't a city official/employee is Dr. Moorkamp. The mayor explained to the audience that Dr. Moorkamp will act as ex-officio, and will carry on as a communicator with the public.

ANNEXATION WON'T COST US ANYTHING???

WRONG!!! Sewer rates are going up "in anticipation" of a revenue bond coming, and to replenish reserves that are being spent on the newly annexed southside. City Administrator John Butz agreed that we are being charged over actual expenses for CURRENT sewer rates due to "anticipated" costs. There was doubt over a reduction of rates once the southside construction is complete. Sounds like a "Royal Flush" for the city.

ANOTHER CHANGE ORDER IN THE WORKS?

A contract was awarded to the "low bidder", Don Maggi, Inc. for the Ozark Terrace Sewer District Improvement. Maggi is often the "low bidder" who gets the job. It is common practice for Maggi to request a "change-order", (a request for more money) during construction in order to finish construction. The worn-out excuse is getting old--even to some council members including Jimmy Dale Williams, who, at the August 3, 1998 council meeting, complained about Maggi's change-order practice, this incident involving a curb and gutter replacement contract.

There was surprisingly no discussion about other bidders for the sewer job, though there were three other firms who submitted bids, one being another local firm! Maggi's bid? \$27,000. Other bids ranged from \$35,000 to \$48,000. There was absolutely no discussion on the matter. Only one council member voted against awarding the job to Maggi. Time will tell.....

CONFLICT OF INTEREST RECOGNIZED

Councilmen Barklage and DeFriese abstained from voting to amend city code regarding the Airport Advisory Committee. Kudos to these two men for recognizing a conflict of interest and responsibly refraining from voting.

NEW SIGNAL AT HWY 63 AND LANNING LANE

A contract was awarded to James H. Drew Corp. of Nixa, Mo. of \$73,606 to construct a new traffic signal at Highway 63 and Lanning Lane (near K-Mart). Councilperson Julie Turley expressed concern over visibility of the new signal for southbound motorists.

PAY UP, MR. RATZLAFF

The council got tough concerning a trash nuisance at 406 Hwy 72 West, DOUBLING the fine to the maximum of \$500. Mr. Don Ratzlaff, who

apparently is a "repeat offender", wasn't present to defend himself.

SPRINGFIELD ACCOUNTING FIRM RENEWS CONTRACT

The accounting firm of Davis, Lynn & Moots renewed a three-year contract with the city. Seventeen firms were notified by mail, seven of which are local. According to Finance Director Dan Murphy, local firms display little interest, citing association with Rolla Municipal Utilities and thus a conflict of interest as a possible reason. (Maurice Alfermann, a local accountant who was contacted is a member of the RMU board). The contract was approved by an 11-1 vote.

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