

No Standing News

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

Volume I

Number 28

March 26, 1999

RECREATIONAL COMPLEXITIES

By Lois Ann Marler

Has your kid ever asked you for money, promising you that it would be spent wisely? You later find out that the money was blown on candy, frivolous gadgets, and pizza. Children sometimes have hidden agendas, not unlike the city of Rolla regarding the proposed recreational center.

In August of 1998, voters approved a ½ cent sales tax in order to construct a multi-million dollar project. What information was given about the proposed project? It was nothing but smoke and mirrors, which is why I voted "no". There was little information on paper, no final designs, no certain location, and concealed information about a future vote for a general obligation bond among other things. I have watched the city council closely for 18 months, and in that time I have learned one important lesson: **THEY CAN'T BE TRUSTED.**

It seems as though the city has pulled a slick one on the voters. If the G.O. bond is approved, your property taxes will be the safety net for making payments on the building for the next 15 years. Finance Director Dan Murphy has "assured" the council that the sales tax will generate sufficient revenue to make the payments. (Does "Murphy's Law" apply here?) Is Murphy's word good enough? Is the sales tax recession-proof? Will it generate enough revenue if any of the sales tax

reduction bills now in the Missouri House pass now or in any year to come?

Even if the general obligation bond is turned down on April 6, they have a back-up plan to forge ahead and build the center by using the lease-purchase method -- ie. just borrow the money. The city, however, has warned the taxpayers that this method could cost more money. In the debt schedule conducted by George K. Baum & Company on December 28, 1998, there is a difference of \$609,925 between the two financing methods. Are the savings of the general obligation bond method worth a gamble on your property taxes?

Some voters have been asking why the G.O. bond can't be revisited at a later date when more concrete plans are in place for the rec center. One reason for the rush to get the G.O. bond issue on the April ballot is because they knew they only need 4/7ths approval for passage (57%). If they scheduled this issue during a non-city (non-April) election, a 2/3rds approval is needed (66%). The sales tax vote in August passed by 63%. If the G.O. bond vote doesn't pass on April 6, it will not likely pass at all.

LEADERSHIP

Something that has made many people nervous about this whole project is that the "man at the helm" is Ken Kwantes, Parks and Recreation Director. He will presumably be the supervisor of the individual hired to manage the rec center. Kwantes, who makes \$48,814 a year PLUS a \$3000 cash car allowance, had a \$19,000 deficit in concessions last year. This is not uncommon, as a deficit has occurred in the past few years in park concessions. When I asked Mr. Kwantes

about the problem with making a profit in concessions, he told me that they were not "food service", and that all summer income is lumped into "concessions." (This is what happens when parks are run **WITHOUT ANY OVERSIGHT BY AN ADMINISTRATIVE PARK BOARD**, as required by state law.)

Mr. Kwantes concealed information from the council prior to the August election regarding the state requirement to buy replacement park land if the rec center is built in Ber Juan Park. He waited to reveal this information to the council at the September 1998 council meeting. For more information about the Land and Water Conservation Fund issue, see NSN issue # 8.

Voters have legitimate concerns about the management of a multi-million dollar complex in light of the fact that our parks have been so poorly managed in recent years. For more information about park mismanagement, see NSN issue #11, "The Lions are Busy as Beavers."

CONCEALED INFORMATION

Our "open and honest government" promise made by Mayor Morgan has suffered a deadly blow. No Standing News has learned of a report given to the Rec Center Ad Hoc Committee which was stamped "Confidential". These "highly-sensitive" papers are dated March 1, 1999 and are the revenue projections for the rec center.

There is no justification for concealing this kind of information from the public. It should have at least been available for inspection at the March 11, 1999 meeting at the Eugene Northern Community Hall. Not only has this information been concealed from the public, it has been concealed from the City Council!

These "Confidential" papers, published by Ballard and King and Associates, give details about rec center employees and salaries, projected admission fees, program fees for fitness, aquatics,

and a pro-shop among other revenues. First-year estimates show expenditures at \$761,410 and revenues at \$655,726 for an 86% recovery rate. Perhaps the city didn't want to bother explaining how they were planning to make up for the \$105,684 shortfall in the first year of operation.

Projected hours of operation are surprising. This report shows hours to be Monday thru Friday, noon to 9:00 p.m.; Saturday 1 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.; and Sunday 2 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Guess there will be no morning walks or work-outs! Surely not! (See the "Confidential" report at our webpage: <http://www.rollanet.org/~rwnash/nsn.html>. You must have Adobe Acrobat reader to view this. If you need to install this free software, you may do so from our site).

REC CENTER FEATURES

Just what will be in the rec center? Sverdrup Facilities, the Architectural and Engineering firm contracted by the city, published a conceptual design of the rec center dated February 5, 1999. In it is a breakdown of square footage on nearly every corner of the proposed center. The city now claims that this design was rejected "on the spot"; however, the Ad Hoc Committee took no vote on the issue. (To view the conceptual design, visit our web site at <http://www.rollanet.org/~rwnash/nsn.html>. You must have Adobe Acrobat Reader installed to view).

Probably the most surprising item in this report is the "Wellness Center", which consists of 25 rooms encompassing 6,981 square feet! There are plans for therapist's offices, a private pediatric room, EIGHT treatment rooms, two evaluation rooms, a speech therapy room, work simulation room, and a doctor's office, along with closets and bathrooms. The center will also have its own entrance. (The city now claims that the Phelps County Regional Medical Center is pulling out from plans to locate in the rec center.)

During the Channel 16 rec center program on March 22, 1999, a caller asked a question about this schematic design. Butz responded that since the city's budget for this project is 11.7 million, with 2 million going into the outdoor pool, and 1 million being spent on the architect, only 9 million is left for the indoor center. Sverdrup's design was for a 76,447 square foot facility, which was more in the ballpark of 12-13 million. Butz went on to say, "...the design has virtually been dismissed and we are now operating without any framework and just looking at a large box at this point that we can support with the facilities and interests that the community might have."

How do we know what to believe? Designs on paper are okay as long as the public doesn't find out about them? Do they really expect us to believe that Sverdrup has the time to doodle schematic designs that don't even come close to what we want? The spin currently coming out of city hall is insulting.

In a flyer published by the city, they claim to be "pursuing all types of consumer groups as the Recreation Center will operate as much like a 'business' as possible...other customers, including the Hospital, University, School System, and/or corporations..." Was this disclosed prior to the vote in August? Did the voters know that the rec center was actually going to be "one-stop shopping" for a variety of community educational, health, social, and commercial interests? Did the voters imagine that the center would include a 2,000 square foot dance/aerobic center (that's dance as in tap, ballet, etc.), tumbling and gymnastics, Tae Kwon Do, and a large "fitness center." It's beginning to sound more like the "Rolla Regional Learning Center and Infirmary" than the "Health and Recreation Center & Outdoor family Aquatic Center" that has been billed.

One interesting thing that is missing from this flyer is any kind of graphic, picture, sketch, etc., of what this multi-million dollar project is

supposed to look like. Seems as though some sort of visual effect would help to sell the public on the idea.

UNHAPPY CAMPERS

On March 18, 1999, I spoke to a representative from Vessell's Fitness Center. Vessell's claims that the city passed a resolution which would limit features in the rec center from competing from existing commercial interests. (That resolution was, in fact, passed by a unanimous vote of the council on January 4, 1999). Section 3 of the resolution states: "That the projected facilities are to fulfill an unmet need within the area."

"We are not opposed to the rec center, what was originally planned. We want to slow the process and meet with the city and decide what will go into it," a Vessell's representative told me. Vessell's Fitness was originally promised "no competition" by the Recreation for Everyone Committee prior to the August 1998 election. Since that time, the city's Rec Center Ad Hoc Committee has received a recommendation from their professional consultants to include "fitness" in the rec center to increase revenue potential.

Vessell's Fitness had planned an all-out attack on the G.O. bond in an attempt to keep the city true to the resolution. Radio spots and a mass mailing have been put on hold due to a possible negotiation. "Under duress from private fitness, city administration has been open to communication and negotiations," Vessell's said. "Vessell's Fitness is negotiating a seat on the next Ad Hoc Committee with Mayor Joe Morgan at this time."

Another group in the community is also frustrated about the preliminary plans for the rec center. The Rolla Fins Swim Club has voiced disappointment that the architectural plans will include a four-lane pool instead of a six-lane pool.

I spoke to Marge Fonner, head coach for the Rolla Fins, a 501(c) 3 organization which is a member of United States Swimming. She claims that the revenue projections have not included Fins' use of the pool, and that the Fins have been virtually excluded from the entire project.

"We're pulling out of the fray," claimed Fonner. "It's not worth our reputation. I don't see any point in beating our heads against the wall."

Fonner claims that only five yards need to be added to the width of the lap pool in order to make it six lanes wide, which is minimum for U.S. Swimming teams, a high school, or city league swimming team. In the Sverdrup conceptual design from February 2, 1999, the design allows for 12,000 square feet of total aquatic surface, with 2,250 square feet of lap pool. In order to make the pool six lanes, an additional 1,125 square feet would need to be added. Fonner suggested to the Ad Hoc Committee and Rolla City Council that they visit the UMR pool which is a 45'x75' (3,375 sq. ft.), six lane pool. (The city now says that total aquatic space will be 15,000 square feet, but give no details.)

The Fins will continue to use UMR's pool regardless of the availability of the Rec Center pool. "We accept the decision that they don't want us there," said Fonner. (Fins currently have 54 swimmers, with a sizeable waiting list.)

Perhaps the most bizarre twist in this bond campaign came on Monday, March 15, 1999 at the Rolla City Council Work Session. Bettye Sheffield, Ward Six Councilwoman and Rec Center Ad-Hoc Committee member, RESIGNED from the committee. Her resignation was pointedly not announced at the council meeting as is customary, in spite of the fact that the entire council, mayor, and city administrator received a copy of her resignation. After three requests for her resignation memo from city hall,

Mayor Morgan finally granted me permission to have a copy. In this memo she states:

"As a member of the Rolla City Council and a member of the Rec-Center Ad-Hoc committee, I feel I cannot in true conscience go along with the Ad-Hoc Committee's recommendation to the City Council to take the swimming pool out of the Rec-Center and put in a leisure pool with 4 lap lanes in it. The people voted in August 1998 for a Rec Center to include an indoor walking track, swimming pool/aquatic center and gymnasium. The ballot for April 6, 1999 to pass a bond issue still includes the swimming pool.

"I am only a representative of the people and when they vote I have no choice but to follow their wishes. I cannot and will not be a part of this. Therefore, I must resign from the Ad-Hoc Committee."

I spoke to Councilwoman Sheffield after learning of her resignation. She told me that a smear campaign began after her resignation, blaming her resignation on pressure from the Fins' parents. She flatly denied being influenced by anything but her principles.

She went on to say that the pool was not the only problem with the plans for the rec center. She was very disturbed with the "Wellness Center" being such a major component in the rec center.

When I contacted the Mayor for a comment on the Sheffield resignation, Mr. Butz replied, "Clearly we hate to see Bettye resign. She has brought a tremendous perspective to the committee and has been a big supporter for recreation in general. Bettye indicated she has resigned because she cannot in good conscious support a single body of water when the August ballot language stated ' . . . Indoor Swimming Pool/Aquatic Center . . .' Unfortunately, that means different things to different people but I do not interpret that as necessarily implying two

separate pools of water -- one lap pool and one leisure pool."

WHO IS REALLY DRIVING THE AGENDA?

Every voter needs to ask a crucial question: WHO IS DRIVING THE REC CENTER AGENDA? Has this whole April election been carefully orchestrated as a bait and switch? As in August, prior to the vote for the half-cent sales tax, there is still no design or final site. "Confidential" reports do nothing to boost confidence in the entire process. City Councilwoman Bettye Sheffield resigns from the Ad Hoc committee DAYS before the election. Does the city really expect us to be gullible sheep AGAIN?

FREE MAYBERRY NOW!!!

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 siteat: <http://www.rollanet.org/~rwnash/nsn.html>

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