

# No Standing News

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

Volume I

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## STUCK IN "THE DREAMING STAGE"

By Phil (People Helping Individuals Learn)

The Ad Hoc Recreation Is For Everyone Committee, (AHRIFE) which should have died a natural death on July 20th, was extended to September 1999, by vote of the council at the July council meeting so the committee could continue going nowhere. Was that a reward for the committee or a punishment for the rest of us? This committee has become a bad joke for a number of reasons. One is because it's clear that some members aren't really trying to provide recreation "for everyone" and certainly not for anyone in a low-income bracket. When questioned earlier this year how some children and families will be able to afford the proposed fees to use the facility, Bill Moorkamp brushed off the problem with a vague reference to letting them work for "underprivileged dollars." That's a typically elitist dismissal of a real problem. Since that glib brush-off they haven't bothered to discuss it again. Is that the kind of community we are? One where the working poor can pay the sales tax but their children can't use the recreation facility without some thoughtless label? It's time for Bill Moorkamp to leave this committee.

We don't imagine Bill "We're Still in the Dreaming Stage" Moorkamp (he actually said that on June 28th) will go willingly. His constant rear-guard sabotage of anything that doesn't go

his way is the reason the committee isn't past "the dreaming stage." While Moorkamp will be an obstructionist until everyone agrees to his "dreams," Councilmen Magdits and Brown snarl if anyone dares ask for some accountability! These guys just don't play well with others. A few ego's and their rigid attitudes have handicapped other more open-minded members in their effort to accommodate, or at least give fair consideration to the wishes and ideas of community groups. We have this recommendation for what the council should do with two members of this committee: Give Moorkamp and Magdits nice shiny plaques and get them out of the way.

To make a bad situation worse they have Ken Kwantes, Parks Director, pretending to give them staff support and telling the council that kids don't like to swim and dive anymore. Sure, and kids don't like Christmas or candy either. The staff work here is a big part of the committee's problem. Another problem is that these people just don't work well with each other. Some committee members say they have voted to have a six lane indoor pool. Others claim they have not voted on six lanes. Even the mayor doesn't seem to know whether they have or not. As late as the Tuesday, July 27th meeting, held at 5 p.m. to discourage public attendance, they are showing six lanes as one of several options. If neither the mayor nor the committee knows whether they have made a decision on the most expensive item in the center, how can they keep having meetings on how many basketball and tennis courts they can afford? The decision on the pool shapes all the other decisions.

After removing the non-functional members of the committee the council needs to find good replacements. They don't have to wait for Morgan to do something. State law says that the Mayor **may recommend** appointments for the council to approve but the law doesn't say the council can't turn them down, remove appointees and vote on their own nominees. Rolla council members who understood their legislative powers have done it in the past. The mayor hasn't lost control of the AHRIFE committee - the mayor has never had control of this committee.

Moorkamp and Magdits are calling all the shots - they dominate but they do not lead. There are a lot of very smart people in town who could do a better job and who have no attitude problem or personal axe to grind. Council members only have to look through their wards to find them. They also need to give the committee someone besides Kwantes to do their staff follow-up. A "refreshed" committee with good staff support might be able to get back on track and regain some credibility with the public. But the committee will have to start from scratch and they should consider these things.

**1. Scrap the Stupid and Expensive Concrete Birdbath plan.** It's not too late to correct that expensive mistake. Go back to the plan for pool repair and improvement that was used to con the voters into giving their approval. Just repair the nice big deep pool that people like to swim and dive in. People are calling this "The Birdbath" and that's what it looks like. It's ridiculous to destroy an expensive city asset just because proper repair and maintenance have been neglected. The St. James pool is older than ours is but it is in very good shape because it has been well maintained. Only two things are wrong with our pool (according to Kwantes); it has leaked for years and the plumbing needs to be replaced. The water and electric infrastructure will have to be replaced to turn it into a birdbath. Fixing the leak instead of filling that big hole with expensive concrete will save a big chunk of the \$1.9 million budgeted for this project. The savings can be

used to put the extra two lanes in the indoor pool and might even cover some work on the storm drainage system to relieve the periodic flooding in some neighborhoods. They should also find out why Waynesville is building an aquatic center for nearly half the cost of our pool renovation! Competition from Waynesville was not in the original financial projections so someone had better start revising those revenue assumptions real fast.

**2. Forget the phony "disaster" deadlines John Butz was pedaling.** The city administrator's claim in June that a "disaster" would result if there was even a small delay to answer questions the council was asking. There was no "disaster", Butz was only trying to help out the real estate crowd and the council fell for it. The land gamblers are desperate to have something - anything - done in a hurry so it can be used as bait to help sell real estate to the Ft. McClellan people. The committee and the council should ignore the personal motives, which have been driving this project and just concentrate on getting Rolla taxpayers the best for their tax money. People who aren't speculating in real estate won't mind waiting another year or even two years for a good plan to be worked out if it makes the wisest and best use of their tax money. This is just recreation - it's not life and death.

**3. The committee should quit having meetings at 6 AM or 5 PM.** Everyone knows that these meeting times are designed to discourage the public from attending. Even the newspaper doesn't show up. Meetings should be well publicized and held at a reasonable time in the evening when interested people can attend. The committee should also remember to be nice. Antagonizing the public at this stage does nothing to help gate receipts later.

**4. Produce the reports on the core samples.** We've paid for them; where are they? It's dead stupid to be in the second year of planning a building without knowing where the building is

going to be built. The assumption is that Ber Juan is the site but that has not been decided or if it has, the committee has neglected to announce it to the rest of us. Stalling on what is normally the first decision on any construction project has raised questions about why this simple analysis is taking so long. When there is an absence of facts, speculation always fills in the information gap. Some of the speculation we hear goes like this: Do some committee members and the mayor and administrator already know that the reports have cleared Ber Juan for a site but that's not what they wanted to hear? Are they stalling until they can think up some other excuse for putting the recreation center in Southview Park? Southview Park is a 27-acre park right in the middle of all the new south-side housing developments. Wouldn't it be just swell to have a big new recreation center with private party rooms, indoor pool and a tennis court within walking distance of the only people who can afford to pay \$375 a year to use it? Was that the plan from the very beginning? That would make all those houses and lots on the south side of town sell like little hot cakes, wouldn't it?

##### **5. Put the horse back in front of the cart.**

After the core sample report is produced then the council can make a decision on the location of the new building and acquisition of the replacement land for the land used by the center. Where is the new replacement parkland the Department of Natural Resources requires and what is it going to cost? DNR must approve an application for substitution before any building can be started. Regardless of what Ken Kwantes says, DNR approval could take months. We probably aren't at the top of DNR's list of things to do. Complying with the agency requirements on the land substitution is a staff function and Ken should have finished it months ago.

**6. At least investigate the possibility of dome construction** and examine the relative costs between this and traditional or "stick" construction. Most importantly, compare the

annual maintenance and heating/air-conditioning costs of each. It doesn't matter if Sverdrup likes it or not. Maybe Sverdrup hasn't suggested more cost-effective construction techniques because they weren't asked about them. Maybe Sverdrup didn't suggest any because they're behind the technology curve or because lower cost construction means they make less money. If either of the last two apply, the solution is simple. The council brought them into this and they can take them out. It's cheaper in the long run to eat our losses now than go ahead with a building we can't afford to heat and air-condition years from now. Everyone knows that huge "stick" buildings create huge bills for upkeep. Ask the Phelps County Commissioners -- they found out too late that the design of the courthouse was going to be a financial burden. Big maintenance and operational bills will necessitate big user fees, which many citizens can't pay. If lots of people can't pay, the only money to subsidize recreation center operations is the general revenue fund, which pays for basic city services. That's just not going to happen, so the committee should explore this and give us a fair and impartial report on what they find out. If a dome or partial dome structure for the pool is more economical and the "experts" from St. Louis can't handle it, the council can get someone else.

##### **7. Add two more lanes to the indoor pool for competitive swimming.** What's the big deal?

Just cut out some meeting or party rooms, which may seldom be rented anyway at the prices Moorkamp and Kwantes are planning to charge. Rolla Fins have a well-established program, which is good for kids and an asset to the community. The school system might be able to add a swimming program to the curriculum if the facility had six lanes, bleachers and other accommodations for this sport. The money swimmers' families would spend in Rolla and in the recreation center during competitions can't be ignored either. No one understands why the committee (or some members of the committee) has gone to such lengths to disoblige such a

successful community program as the Rolla Fins. Since Moorkamp has never given anyone a good reason for not doing it - just do it. The savings in repairing instead of destroying the outdoor swimming pool will provide more than enough money to cover the two lanes.

**8. Get a second opinion.** Call the YMCA and pay them for, at the very least, some consulting service. The University of Missouri at Columbia also has recreation experts who could look at the plan (if there is a plan) and give an objective opinion. It wouldn't waste much more than has already been squandered on, for instance, sending Ken to Denver to make him look like someone who knows what he's doing. If after all these years he hasn't learned how to run a popcorn stand without losing \$20,000 a year he's not going to get better with a one-week course. The "experts" from St. Louis will design any stupid thing they're told to build but they will be long gone when it has to be closed down because it doesn't generate a million dollars a year in fees to keep it open. In the pro-forma, they have warned the committee that by the third year the novelty will have worn off and the revenue will begin to decline unless the programs and outreach are very, very good. Sverdrup predicts revenue growth after the first three years will be due to, "increases in the population (if there is any) within the market area, a specific marketing plan to develop alternative markets (whatever those are), the development of new amenities (buying new gadgets) or by increasing user fees" (a Kwantes favorite). Recreation programs, which an experienced and capable recreation director (if we had one) would be designing right now, will have everything to do with whether this center can cover the annual operating costs of over one million dollars. Why let a committee of amateurs and Ken Kwantes conduct an \$11.7 million experiment and wind up with disastrous design and program mistakes that the YMCA learned to avoid years ago?

**9. Add a terrific rollerblade/skateboard area** to the recreation center grounds or elsewhere in Ber Juan or another park. The council was wrong to pass an ordinance last year that doesn't let kids skate on any sidewalk in the whole city. Our city "fathers" have forced our children to play in the traffic. That was a really rotten thing for council members, who actually are fathers and mothers, to do to little kids. Councilman Owsley's nasty comment, "Never liked those damn kids anyway" (he should remember that is a live microphone in front of his face) surely does not reflect the feelings of the rest of the council. Well, not some of them anyway. It's selfish and short sighted to spend \$11.7 million on recreation and not allocate a few thousand dollars for a paved rollerblade/skate board course for kids who have been officially kicked into the streets and threatened with arrest. Rollerblading and skate boarding are among the most popular outdoor sports in the country for adults as well as children and there ought to be at least one thing in this project that little kids don't have to pay through the nose to use.

**10. Be financially realistic.** It's a very big mistake to base the operating budget and the fees for the recreation center on getting a contract with the hospital for \$500,000 a year. The PCRMC board may have the money now when the economy is good and people are paying their hospital bills. But when the economy goes sour, Medicare reimbursement rules change, hospital board members change or any one of a number of other things which can go wrong, do go wrong, the hospital board will have to cut their budget. This item will be among the first to go because it's not an essential medical service. The PCRMC "Corporate Partner" can become a "Corporate Stranger" in the blink of an eye. This half million-dollar annual 'donation' by the hospital board is just a gimmick concocted by two administrators to bail out bad committee planning. In return, City Administrator Butz is pretending that David Ross, the PCRMC administrator, isn't violating city zoning laws with

the hospital office he has established in the Powell R-1 neighborhood. The truth is that without the so-called "health component" rent by their PCRMC Corporate Partner they can only make the operating costs on this building come within 85% of the operating funds they need even with family fees in the \$375+ range.

Did the voters know they were taxing themselves for doctor's offices and speech therapy rooms? We don't think so. Has the hospital board voted to do this? Does the hospital board really think patients aren't going to scream like scalded cats when they're presented with a big hospital bill for therapy in a building they've paid taxes to build, pledged their homes to guarantee, and then paid another big annual fee to use? If the hospital does cut back or cancel their contract at any time - and they can do it at any time - the city will not be able to replace that \$500,000 windfall in the center's operating budget. This so-called "Corporate Partnership" money is nothing but a financial crutch so the committee can avoid dealing with a lot of tough design/program issues and choices. Does the committee have a sustainable financial plan that doesn't include a big subsidy from the hospital? What will happen if this rose-colored assumption falls through?

**11. After it's built then what?** Is the council going to wait until the grand opening to search for a recreation director who can provide the experience, creativity and enthusiasm necessary to make the facility a financial success? Shouldn't they have already found a new director to help with the planning? If there is an assumption here by the committee or the council that Ken Kwantes will just get this position by default because he has hung around a long time and has started wearing suits - they better think again. In the pro-forma Sverdrup warns that: "There is no guarantee that the expense and revenue projections outlined in the operations analysis will be met as there are many variables that affect such estimates that either can not be accurately measured...." The most critical "variable" they're

talking about is the skill of the recreation center director. The only skill Ken Kwantes has demonstrated in all these years is that he could keep his salary and perks increasing while the park and recreation system has become stale under his uninspired management. Will Ken just be allowed to sit with his feet up in his big new office and run the center the way he has 'run' the park system? Is Moorkamp dreaming about being the chairman of a new board of directors for the center? The very thought ought to make everyone queasy.

Another thing about Ken Kwantes that we've noticed is that he dodges issues like a skateboard park or diving by saying the insurance company won't like it. When is someone going to make him prove what he says? If the possibility of accidents and potential liability is going to be the design criteria here we might as well scrap the whole project right now. Accidents and lawsuits are always a theoretical possibility no matter what anyone does or how they do it. Look around Rolla; the city has potential lawsuits everywhere you look. If we can't do the very same things that other cities are doing for their children, like diving and skateboard parks, because the insurance company won't like it, then it's time we found another insurance company - and another Ken.

That's NSN's recommendation for what the council should be doing to restore their credibility and get this project back on track. But the council (excepting Magdits and Brown) seems to be intimidated by this committee and they are just sitting passively while the project runs in circles, picking up more public ill will with every revolution. Getting elected is easy; governing is hard. Sometimes governing means biting the bullet and replacing ineffectual appointees, firing poor employees, admitting management mistakes and starting all over again when things are clearly fouled up. This is another leadership test for Mayor Morgan and the council. Do they have the guts it takes to really 'govern' or will they just

blame the disappointing results on someone else and make excuses for not controlling their own appointees while what could be a wonderful 11.7 million-dollar opportunity is ruined?

We hear many people complaining to each other and to us about this project. If citizens don't agree with what the committee is doing, they had better apply more direct pressure and do it fast. In just a few weeks the bulldozers will start destroying the swimming pool because last month the council let themselves be pressured by the City Administrator's claim that the sky would fall if they didn't vote and quit asking questions - so they caved in and quit asking questions. There is still time for the council to rescue this project. Try calling up your council representatives and tell them the sky is falling. This time it might be true. If the council doesn't straighten out this project why should voters ever approve another dollar for them to waste? In November they're going to ask you to approve another five million dollars to fix a sewer treatment plant. If voters, soured at the waste of \$11.7 million, don't approve another \$5 million, what will the council do? That question was asked at the last meeting. No one answered.

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Contact your City Council and let them know how you feel.

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