

# No Standing News

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

Volume I

Number 49

December 17, 1999

## IT'S BAAAACK!!!

### HOW DO YOU SPELL BAILOUT? B-U-E-H-L-E-R P-A-R-K

By Lois Ann Marler

**L**ike a dog returning to its vomit, and a sow to its wallowing, the Mayor has decided to once again put Buehler Park up for sale. The council met in closed session on December 6, 1999, citing the "real estate" provision of the Sunshine Law, RSMo 610. After the closed session, City Counselor John Beger announced, "The council was asked whether it wanted to entertain a proposal to buy Buehler Park from an as-yet unnamed developer. Instead, the council voted to authorize the administration to draft a request for proposals for purchase and use of Buehler Park." What a message of holiday cheer the city is sending to its citizens!

After two attempts, the city capitulated and released some information I had requested regarding the questionable closed-door meeting. I received a letter from City Clerk Carol Daniels, which explained that at the 12-6-99 meeting, a motion was made by Councilman **Ed Owsley** and seconded by **Don Barklage** to authorize a "request for proposal" for prospective buyers for Buehler Park. Those who voted in favor were: **Eudaly, Sheffield, Williams, Brown, Owsley, Estey, Barklage, Magdits, Jepsen, and Wiggins**. Those who voted in opposition were: **Rothwell** and **DeFriese**.

Propaganda regarding the city's announcement has been rather subdued. The Rolla Daily News buried the news story on page 10, two days after the council meeting. City Administrator John Butz was on KTTR's "Dayline" program discussing the move to sell the park with a "ho-hum-business-as-usual" attitude. This is all a ploy to downplay the issue and drive away protestors.

#### WHY NOW? WHY AT ALL?

One major question remains to be answered: WHY? Without first asking the Mayor WHY they should sell any park, the city council let themselves be blindfolded and led to the next question, HOW they would sell the park.

Why sell Buehler Park? Why sell *any* park? The only answer that we're getting is that they need the money to fund "parks and park improvements." Didn't we just pass a half-cent sales tax for that? What kind of improvement would justify selling one park to spruce up another?

City Administrator John Butz has said that the city isn't looking for the highest bid for the park, but the "best value." The best value for whom? For the community? The best value for the PUBLIC is to keep the park, something the citizens have paid taxes to develop and maintain for over 40 years!

Notice how the city waited to bring up this hot topic until they could secure successful passage of the elections. The rec center sales tax and bond passed, and the sewer tax just passed last month. We can now pat ourselves on the back

for having one of the highest sales tax rates in the state (7.725%). Is this excessive taxation not sufficient to meet the needs of the community?

Can Butz be serious in his statement that the city needs to sell parks in order to buy others and improve them? That's terribly warped thinking and insulting to the people who pay his salary. Its no more warped, however, than Morgan's justification for selling the park. Our "land development mayor" admitted to NSN editor Robert Nash last year that his reason for selling the park is that it is "good commercial property." What other city property is Joe planning to sell next?

The City Council should begin asking tough questions like, "What kind of parks and park improvements are you planning, Mayor? Is the parks department being so ill-managed that we must resort to cannibalism? Is the rec center budget in trouble? Is that why you want us to kill a park - to bail out the bad management of your recreation center?"

### THE OTHER BAILOUT

Another highly probable use of the money from the sale of Buehler Park is to bail out the Chamber of Commerce and local banks by purchasing the Forest Service land on which the Visitors' Center is built. Depending on how much money he gets for Buehler Park, we predict the Mayor will use the proceeds for either or both of these bailouts.

In 1994, the city signed a "Memorandum of Understanding" with the Chamber and Forest Service in which the city agreed to purchase the Forest Service land in order to build the Chamber a new clubhouse and tourism center. The memorandum reads in part, "The Forest Service will make the property available to the Rolla Area Chamber of Commerce under the terms of a Special Use permit **pending acquisition** of the property by the City of Rolla..." Instead of putting the cart in *front* of the horse, the Chamber and three local banks decided the very

next year to forge ahead with the building plans *without the city actually buying the land!* Phelps County Bank, Mercantile Bank and then-Boatmen's Bank coughed up the cash (\$290,000) and the Visitors' Center was born. (I have requested a copy of the bank note for the Visitors' Center, but the city claims they don't have one.)

The city could have used their portion of the motel tax to purchase the land with the painless \$13,000/year financing the Forest Service was extending to the city. Instead, they have let time lapse while the price tag on the land has been climbing every year.

It is important to note that, despite years of propaganda to the contrary, the Rolla Area Chamber of Commerce is NOT a part of the Rolla city government. They are a PRIVATE LOBBY ORGANIZATION, not unlike a local labor union or country club, and are precluded from purchasing the Forest Service Property by federal law. That's why the city has to buy the land for them. The confusion over their identity arises because the members of the Rolla Chamber of Commerce are more than content to dine from the public trough. Because they "promote" Rolla they feel we owe them! This "volunteer" community organization has already had their purse fattened with 90% of the motel tax, which amounts to approximately \$180,000 per year to promote "tourism" in Rolla, a town with no tourist attractions. Their contract with the city was signed before the voters approved the motel tax.

The Buehler Park-Chamber bailout connection can be seen as far back as 1992, but became brazenly evident in a 1998 memo from Chamber Chairman Buz Harvey. That letter was the catalyst for the first issue of NSN.\* The letter outlined details of a meeting between city and chamber officials. Besides asking the city for help with their bank loan, Harvey wrote, "**The City of Rolla will develop a preliminary park plan in anticipation of the day when the tourism site is acquired from the U. S. Forest**

**Service for use as a city park. The city and Chamber will work together to find the money needed to acquire the U.S. Forest Service site at the earliest practical opportunity."** Butz added to this memo by writing, "...we indicated we do not see any such funds in the foreseeable future."

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[http://www.rollanet.org/~rwnash/NSN\\_1\\_01.htm](http://www.rollanet.org/~rwnash/NSN_1_01.htm)  
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Two months later, in September of '98, Mayor Morgan announced plans to sell Buehler Park and replace it with a park on the Forest Service property. He heard the desperation pleas from his Chamber cronies and three banks (Morgan is a board member of Mercantile Bank), and went into action by telling the City Engineering Department to develop a site plan for the new park. One look at this new "plan" and the actual topography of the Forest Service land revealed how tons of fill would be used to bury one of our civil war sites to accommodate a parking lot and picnic tables. It was evident that this half-baked idea wasn't going to fly. The idea of selling the park was, at the time, dropped like a hot potato, but like foolish children, the Mayor and the Chamber have decided to pick it up again.

Do they really think we have forgotten about everything that has gone under the bridge? Are they so desperate for a bailout that they just hope we have?

The real question being asked of the council is not, "Shall we sell Buehler Park?" Rather, it is, "Shall we bail out the Chamber?"

## CONCLUSION

The council understands how the community as a whole feels about Chamber/bank bailouts and the prostituting of our city parks. This issue is a litmus test for our elected officials. It will prove where their allegiance lies: either with self-centered, private interests, or with the PUBLIC, the people who own the park, the ones who have for three years reminded them over and

over again of their sentiments toward selling established park land.

They also have an election coming up, with filing beginning next week. Do the incumbents really want a powder keg to deal with in their campaign?

This is a perfect opportunity for leadership to emerge from our city council. This is a perfect opportunity to let the issue rest once and for all by putting the question to the public in the form of a referendum. Is there a second to the motion?

*Editor's note: If you have an opinion regarding this highly volatile issue, send it to us at [rwnash@rollanet.org](mailto:rwnash@rollanet.org), and we will post it on our web page. Look for part 2 of the Buehler Park saga in "The Legacy of Buehler Park."*

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## FREE JUDGE MAYBERRY!!

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