

# No Standing News

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

Volume I

Number 63

May 16, 2000

## TIPS FOR NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS

The three new council members - Williams, Visnapuu and Kiefer - may have been surprised when at their second meeting they heard the Mayor make up a new rule to choke off public comments a little tighter. His first rule was that no citizen could speak until after the council meeting was over and the vote taken. No point in saying much then is there? Now you can speak during "Citizen Communication" at the end of the meeting, but only if you speak about something that is NOT on the agenda. If you want to speak to something ON the agenda, you have to ask Joe's permission before the meeting or fill out a card during the meeting?? He doesn't say what to do with the card after you fill it out. You could eat it or make an airplane out of it? These Special Rules of Conduct for Council Meetings that Morgan periodically invents aren't legitimate unless the council adopts them in written form and posts them so the public will know what they are. Joe never asks the council for their permission, and the council, in ignorance of their own rules of procedure, never stop him so - Morgan makes the rules because Morgan Rules.

**Williams, Visnapuu and Kiefer:** Because they are new council members some of the antics of their first few meetings must be strange to the three new members. Two of them, Visnapuu and Kiefer, raised reasonable questions at their first two meetings. We hope to see better public service from the three of them than we have received from the

council in the past. If the new council members are inclined to resist the bullying of the executive branch; if they understand that council actions based on incomplete information and illegal practices are dangerous; if they are not inclined to swallow the unsupported opinions of Morgan's "experts", they will still find it difficult to be effective council members. Stopping the following bad practices would be a start at cleaning up Rolla's government and Rolla's reputation.

**! Reinventing Government - Morgan Style:** Joe doesn't like democracy: it interferes with business. Since he has never bothered to learn anything about third-class city government, he just makes it up as he goes along. He invents rules for the council to obey, rules for citizens to obey and he even makes up definitions of words that aren't in city ordinances. It is easy for him to do all of those things because he isn't handicapped by knowledge of the Constitution or respect for the law.

**! Roberts Rules:** Council votes are rarely ever taken correctly. Joe pays more attention to manipulating the vote he wants than how the vote is taken. Watch how often his parliamentary stumbling leads to confusion and a waste of council time. Because Morgan never restates the motion before the council votes, as a presiding officer is required to do, you will never be sure what you've really voted on until you read some approximate version of it weeks later in the minutes. Using Roberts Rules of Order when initiating a vote or passing an ordinance, as the council is legally required to do, is the first step in protecting the legality of council actions.

Insist on knowing exactly what you're voting on - it will keep you from looking as foolish as the rest of them. When Morgan asks if the council is ready to vote, ask that the clerk read back the motion. You will be surprised how often what she reads isn't what you think you were about to vote on.

**! Meetings:** Council meetings (no matter what cute name they are given or how the seating is arranged) are all public meetings of the legislative body with few exceptions. Read the Sunshine Law yourself. It is very clear regardless of the Morgan/Butz claim that it is so difficult to understand that they have to "interpret" it for you. If you participate in illegal meetings or illegally closed sessions because of their "interpretations", you are breaking the law. Knowing the law is your responsibility. **Council meetings belong to the council, not the mayor and city administrator.** The mayor may only preside for the purpose of enforcing parliamentary order. He should express no opinions, make no recommendations to the council and show no partisanship at any time. He has no right to tell any member of the legislative body what they can or cannot do or what the council can or cannot discuss. Joe has abused his presiding officer duties so many times that he should be permanently replaced by the mayor pro tem. The council has the power to do that.

**! Rudeness:** Good manners cost nothing and they are usually repaid with courtesy and respect. That's why the mayor doesn't get either. Morgan is rude and disrespectful to anyone who doesn't agree with him or who doesn't belong to his social circle. If you sit in cowed silence, as most council members do, and

let him snarl and bully citizens and fellow council members, you will share his reputation for rude and uncivil behavior. On the other hand you can do the right thing and call him down for it. Former mayors have managed much more difficult meetings with the dignity due the office and with the courtesy to which citizens are entitled. Morgan is a disgrace, but he will be your disgrace if, by your silence, you give consent to his behavior

· ! **Control of the Agenda:** The council agenda is the council's agenda - not the Morgan/Butz agenda. The mayor and administrator are allowed to put it together because Butz is in the office where it is easier to assemble it. You will soon figure out that the council agenda is designed to keep the council from having time to discuss the council's issues and concerns. If you take the 30 seconds Morgan allows you at the end of the meeting to bring up something you or your constituents are concerned about (when everyone is tired and ready to go home), you will either be ignored or Administration "will get back to you later." Don't hold your breath. Morgan and Butz do not intend for you to take up council time discussing IF the city can afford to annex more property: they intend for you to just vote in favor of the avalanche of annexations and rezonings coming out of P&Z these days and not worry whether the city can afford it. If you ask "WHY?" too many times Morgan will shut you off and tell you there is no time or it's not appropriate to discuss it now. If you insist, you will then be given a large dose of Butz-speak. Morgan will again complain that you are dragging out the meeting. He thinks having short meetings is much better than having meaningful meetings.

· ! **Agenda Delays:** Morgan and Butz will always have your agenda materials too late for you to read, think and get your questions answered before the council meeting. The council periodically whines about not having time to study the meeting material, but that's all they ever do - whine. You can

whine about it too, or you can do something about it. The council has the power to stop that bad practice with one short ordinance. The ordinance only needs to say, "If council agenda and materials are not received at least **five business days** before the scheduled council meeting, the meeting is automatically cancelled." Morgan is the one who wants two meetings a month. If he can't handle a businesslike schedule and get the information to you in a timely manner, go back to one meeting a month.

· ! **Appointments:** All appointments are the council's appointments - not the Mayor's appointments. At the April 17th meeting when Morgan was forced to admit that only the council has the power to appoint a member to the P&Z board, Morgan said, "Basically, I am asking for a motion to approve those positions (on the list) that I have the authority to approve." He was trying to sell another Morgan invention - that HE has the power to make ALL OTHER appointments. He doesn't. The fact is that the Mayor has no authority to "approve" the appointment of anyone to any position in the city without the consent of the city council. He may recommend, but the council may ignore his recommendations and approve their own candidates. When the council appoints, only the council can remove. The only reason mayors usually get their "suggestions" approved is because lazy council members don't make any effort to find candidates of their own. It would be a very healthy thing for Rolla if council members recruited some committee members themselves and tried to involve a larger cross-section of Rolla citizens instead of getting caught off guard and having no option but to rubberstamp Morgan's appointees. Rolla needs new blood and new ideas. The "old blood" that keeps a grip on power and city money by appointments to multiple boards and committees has accomplished little of value to the larger community, but they have certainly benefited a chosen few. Their uninspired and antiquated attitudes have robbed the town

of growth, jobs and progress despite all their empty hype to the contrary.

· ! **Ask Questions:** Don't assume that because you're new everyone else knows the answers. If you don't know the answer, half the council doesn't know the answer either - they just don't want to admit they don't know. The other half think they know the answer but half the time they're wrong. If the mayor doesn't like where he thinks you are going with your questions, he will try to make you think they are dumb, unimportant or a waste of council time. That means he doesn't know the answer either. John Butz is paid to know the answers or to find out for you; however, Butz caved in to Morgan and the old men in the Rolla Power Club long ago, so the information you get from him is designed to get the result they want. If you can't understand what Butz is saying, don't worry - it's not your hearing. Butz talks in circles. The reason you can't understand him is because he really isn't saying anything. This leads us back to why you get your meeting packets at the last minute: The less you know the more malleable you will be. The less time you have to prepare and find out the rest of the story, the more times you will go along with what they want because you don't know enough to raise any legitimate questions.

· ! **Beware Joe's "Experts":** Joe's lazy fallback is to tell you that "you have to trust the experts." That means he doesn't know how to get things done and doesn't want to bother his pretty head figuring it out. It's easier just to pay an "expert" to supply the answers. A lot of tax money has been flushed down the drain in the last two years "trusting the experts." Third-class government is not a task reserved for experts. It is government by ordinary people who hopefully are not too lazy to work and learn how to do it and do it right. Remember, you ASKED to be elected, no one held a gun to your head and no one promised you it wouldn't take some time and work hard to do a good job.

· ! **Morgan's Lawyers:** They're paid by the city and called city counselors but they've only once failed to find an excuse to justify whatever Morgan wants. Most members of the council (and the public) are intimidated by anyone with a law degree and we can't figure out why. Somewhere there must be brilliant lawyers who graduated at the top of their class, but we're not sure any of them are practicing in Rolla. When any attorney gives any client a written "opinion" and cites no plausible legal source, the client who accepts it is a fool. If a lawyer cannot prove to his client that his opinion is backed up by a credible consensus of his profession, then his opinion is worth as much as your barber's. Maybe less. If only lawyers can read and understand third-class city laws, then only lawyers would be allowed to be council members. State laws setting out the powers and limitations of third-class cities are not written in Greek and they are, for the most part, intended to be read and used by ordinary, thinking elected officials who are wise enough to use them. Before you defer to the lawyers only because they are lawyers, stop and think - there is a reason for all those dead lawyer jokes.

Many cities are burdened with self-serving mayors (Miami for instance) and their greedy friends, but the harm they can do is limited IF the legislative body knows what their powers are and they use them to make sensible public policies and prudently spend public money. We have suspected for some time that the city is already in, or heading for, serious financial trouble. The only thing that has kept it from surfacing so far is a booming economy, low energy prices and a council that doesn't ask too many questions as long as Murphy can keep up his financial juggling act. Unless the council starts putting the breaks on soon, the outlook is grim. The council has let themselves become the tool of a few aging elitists who are accustomed to helping themselves to public tax money under the guise of economic development. When the crash comes they will be the first to vanish - the council

will be left with the mess and no one to blame but themselves.

Right after his election it became obvious that Joe is nothing more than a water boy for the Chamber, RCDC and RMU. Joe just doesn't have the finesse to conceal whom he's rolling the pork barrel for. We hope the three new council members will start a new council tradition by taking the time to learn the legislative and procedural basics and insist on following them before they get sucked into going along with the sleazy practices and crass behavior that are the trademark of the Morgan Administration. However good the personal intentions and ethics of the new members may have been when they took office, going along with the Mayor's crowd, just out of ignorance, will tar them with the same brush. Now that Rolla citizens can watch this low comedy twice a month in the comfort of their homes, city government has become the object of public ridicule and contempt - and deservedly so. That's the price of council ignorance.

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