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NEWS

Park Ridge kisses SOC goodbye City Council quits anti-O'Hare expansion group after 23 years

By Darcy Hendricks
Staff Writer

One of the founding members of the Suburban O'Hare Commission pulled out Monday night as Park Ridge aldermen voted to no longer support the anti-airport expansion organization.

Spurred on by promises made during a contentious campaign prior to the April 1 municipal elections, the Park Ridge City Council in May postponed a vote on renewing, for another year, its 23-year membership in SOC.

The council postponed votes on a \$64,600 payment to SOC for annual dues, and delayed a \$300,000 payment to cover future anti-O'Hare expansion litigation costs, subject to interviews with SOC members as well as those of the O'Hare Noise Compatibility Commission, which were held in the last several weeks.

In two separate votes, alder-

men voted 7-6 to not make either payment to SOC, essentially resigning the city's membership on the commission.

Sixth Ward Alderman Michael MaRous, whose Park Ridge consulting firm represents O'Hare interests, recused himself from both discussions and the final votes. Had he not done so, the outcome may well have been turned around. In fact, by not voting, MaRous may have "cast" the swing vote on the issue.

If MaRous had voted with the six other members of his Homeowners Party, the tally would have been 7-7. Mayor Ronald Wietecha (a staunch supporter of SOC), who votes on the council only in case of ties, would have given the "yes" side one more vote for a total of 8-7, in favor of paying SOC and continuing membership in the commission.

The actual 7-6 vote against

membership resulted in both positive and negative reactions from city officials.

Alderman Rex Parker, who voted against supporting SOC, said the city money needs to be used on other city-related projects. In a separate conversation, he said he was pleased with the outcome.

"It's time to work on problems in Park Ridge," said the 6th Ward alderman. "Now we can focus on our town."

On the other hand, Wietecha, a commission officer, said he was disappointed.

"I think the decision was not based on facts that were pre-

sented," he said. "I think the facts speak for themselves. If O'Hare (International Airport) is developed and flights double, they will have a negative impact on the quality of life in the town."

Prior to discussions Monday night, Wietecha made reference to a map from the City of Chicago's Airport Layout Plan Submittal for O'Hare International Airport dated December 2002. The map illustrates the noise levels surrounding Park Ridge under the current proposed airport expansion plan. Park Ridge, primarily in the city's southern-most wards, is

shown to be heavily affected by noise pollution from the new landings and take-off patterns, Wietecha said.

"I really think that map is significant," he said in a later conversation. "I just don't know why it was ignored."

Those aldermen who favored SOC membership noted the possible increase of noise and air pollution and the affects of expansion on Park Ridge. Some were also worried about the possibility of quick-take action by Chicago.

Alderman Sue Beaumont

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said, "No one wants to shut down the airport," but she said one of her concerns lies with the increased pollution.

Alderman Dawn Disher said though she sees the benefits of joining an organization such as the O'Hare Noise Compatibility Commission (ONCC), she also said SOC has proven itself over the 23 years, and she supports its efforts.

However, Alderman Mark Anderson said city money needs to be spent more wisely, and Alderman Howard Primark said he has heard from residents that the city should "stop spending money that isn't getting results."

Similarly, Alderman Jeff Cox in a later conversation said many residents he has talked with do not support city's involvement in SOC.

"I think that we have done what the citizens wanted us to do," said the 7th Ward Alderman. "When I was running for alderman, most citizens were not in favor of funding SOC, so I made a decision to not support that."

As the aldermen's vote split on the issue, so did many of the

public comments made Monday night. Some residents favored SOC, noting its success, while others said the new technology of the aircrafts has helped cut noise and air pollutants. The noise is not as bad as it used to be, some said.

Craig Johnson, SOC vice

organization, Johnson said the ultimate loss will be to the Park Ridge residents.

Johnson said SOC has changed in its composition over the years, and the loss of Park Ridge will not be a devastating one. Park Ridge now joins Niles and Des Plaines as former SOC members.

With the departure from SOC, Park Ridge City Council members are to discuss in the August City Council meeting the possibility of joining the O'Hare Noise Compatibility Commission. The ONCC is an organization formed in 1996 to bring communities, school districts and residents together to help reduce aircraft noise surrounding O'Hare.

Alderman Cox said residents move to Park Ridge knowing O'Hare is a neighbor to the community.

"It's time to sit down and talk about what we can do to move forward instead of spending time with litigations," he said.

Staff Writer

Patrick Corcoran
contributed to this report.

Here's how they voted

The Park Ridge City Council was asked Monday night to approve an annual dues payment of \$64,600 to the Suburban O'Hare Commission and also to approve a \$300,000 payment to cover the costs of future litigations. In two separate votes, Aldermen voted 7-6 against making the payments, thereby ending the city's 23-year membership in SOC.

(4th), Mark Anderson (5th), Rex Parker (6th), Jeffrey Cox (7th) and Larry Friel (7th).

"YES" votes

Richard DiPietro (2nd Ward), John Benka (2nd), Andrea Rundblad-Bateman (3rd), Sue Bell (3rd), Sue Beaumont (4th) and Dawn Disher (5th).

"NO" votes

Donald Crampton (1st Ward), Michael Tinaglia (1st), Howard Primark

Sixth Ward Alderman Michael MaRous recused himself from voting on both issues. Mayor Ronald Wietecha votes only in case of a tie.