

Letters to the editor

http://www.pioneerlocal.com/parkridge/news/forum/1345547_pr-letters-122508-s1_article

December 25, 2008

Assess budget, police station costs first

Recently the City Council was asked to consider referendum language regarding improvements to the Park Ridge police facilities. I did NOT support the submission because I disagree with the implied suggestion that land purchases are needed and more than \$16.5 million is required to improve city facilities. In my opinion spending more and purchasing new land are not appropriate, nor needed. The proposed referendum read to the Council suggested otherwise. **[This is the same Ald. Wsol who in Spring 2007 supported up to \$19 million in bonded debt for the new cop shop, then proposed as recently as this past October spending \$16.5 million, plus interest, on the new cop shop.]**

The police facility project needs to address many long standing challenges. A few of those issues include inadequate female officer locker and shower facilities **[Are they inadequate or just undesirable? Are they legal violations that subject the City to possible lawsuits? If so, why have they been allowed to exist for so many years?]**, the lack of proper security and separation areas for prisoners/visitors **[What is not "proper" about the "security" and "separation areas"? If it is not "proper," does it compromise the health, safety and welfare of the people in that facility, or elsewhere in Park Ridge? If so, why has this situation been allowed to exist for so many years?]**, a lack of separate areas for juveniles **[Ditto]**, a lack of counseling space **[Ditto]**, inadequate evidence storage and processing areas **[Has any evidence been lost or compromised so that an investigation or prosecution was lost? If so, why has this been allowed to exist for so many years?]**, augmented training areas are needed **[What are these and why are they needed?]**, the inefficient unsafe entry way and public facility access are all problematic. **[How so? And if so, why has this been allowed to exist for the past few decades, or even for the past three years since Wsol has been in office?]** See the shortfalls for yourself by requesting a tour though Police Lieutenant Bob Hanson (847) 318-5275. **[By all means, take a tour. And ask Lt. Hanson all of these questions to see if he has any answers – because nobody else on the police force or on the City Council has been able to answer them]**

As to "spending" referendums please recall the City Council adopts a financial budget every year. Since 1998 that budget has, on average, followed a pattern of approximately 80 percent "Operational" spending and approximately 20 percent "Capital" spending (actual capital improvements and debt service). "Capital" spending since 1998 has included a new Public Works Service Center, Courtland land purchase, new water reservoir/water transmission lines, Uptown redevelopment including expanded parking plus numerous improvements to our streets, alleys, sewers, heavy equipment and more.

In dollars that means that you, the taxpayers have supported and paid for approximately \$100 million in capital improvements and debt service since 1998. **[Just because we've paid for them doesn't mean that we "supported" them, because the City never asked us whether we wanted any of those things – or in what order of priority.]**

Of the \$100 million spent since 1998 on capital improvements none of that spending was subject to a referendum, not one dollar. **[Correct, because nobody on the City Council had the decency to put any of it to referendum]** In fact, the current structure of the Park Ridge city government approved by the taxpayers and voters provides for the elected body of mayor and aldermen to act on such matters without such provision. **[Just because the city, as a home rule body, can legally make these decisions without referendum doesn't mean it must, or should. And if the City Council doesn't need or want to hear about what the**

citizens think, via referendum, then why do they always brag about how they have consulted their constituents and are doing what their constituents want?]

In the budget City Manager Hock is developing I believe we should continue long term investments in our community infrastructure plus we should consider a project to improve our inefficient police facilities. **[How are our police facilities “inefficient”? If so, why does our police department continually receive awards? And if so, have criminal investigations, criminal prosecutions and public safety been compromised? If so, why has this been allowed to exist for so long?]** I believe we can do both without a negative impact to current city services, without purchasing land, without underground parking for police vehicles, by following a fixed budget so current tax levels do not increase. **[What kind of “fixed budget” can we expect the City to follow when the City Council, on which Ald. Wsol has served for almost four years, passed a budget that ended up being \$1.7 million in the red last year, and is looking at even more red ink this year? And our taxes keep going up, even without a new multi-million cop shop that will cost us over \$28 million over the next 20+ years? So Ald. Wsol’s belief looks pretty close to worthless at this point in time.]**

Once City Manager Hock has had an opportunity to address our current budget fluctuations I believe he should also create balanced pro-forma budgets through 2012 which demonstrate the city's ability to manage the anticipated results of this investment including its impact on cash flows and related revenues/expenses for current and expected service levels. **[What a bunch of gobbledy-gook! What exactly are “balanced pro forma budgets” and how accurate are they likely to be 4 years out when we can’t even balance our budget one year out? And a new cop shop isn’t an “investment” – because it produces nothing in the way of revenue or profit, nor does it appreciate in value like private property. In fact, we can expect the new cop shop to do nothing but depreciate in value each year.]** While the actual start date for constructing a police facility project could begin in 2009; depending on the financial review it might need to be pushed back to 2010. In either case, I believe the project requirements need to limit spending as well as incorporate the current police space and Courtland property in the plan. **[What “project requirements”? “Limit spending” to what amount, and why? And from where did Ald. Wsol get this bright idea, given that for the past couple of years he was voting for the big new \$19 million cop shop?]**

Adopting a plan that addresses these and other issues in a managed and conservative approach is the next step the Council will be asked to consider. **[This is just a stall tactic from a guy who has already signed on to two different plans, a \$19 million one and a \$16.5 million one. Is that what Ald. Wsol considers a “managed and conservative approach”? What has Park Ridge City government done in the past decade – other than not to build a new library after the citizens bucked the City Council to put that issue to referendum and then overwhelmingly defeated it – that was “managed and conservative”?]** Once that begins the citizens and City Council will then more clearly understand what the final facility will include under a fixed and firm budget. **[Once again, more political tap-dancing and stall tactics to get the City and Mayor Coward past the April referendum so that the taxpayers don’t get to vote and show the City Council just how much they don’t want to spend multi-millions on a new cop shop.]** Hopefully this clarifies why I would not support the suggested referendum language and where the police facility project has evolved to over the last three plus years of numerous open public meetings. **[No, Ald. Wsol, it “clarifies” nothing other than you are a craven politician who, like Mayor Coward and his Alderpuppets, is afraid to let the taxpayers vote on this issue. And what exactly has the cop shop project “evolved to” over “the last three plus years” other than that the City Council still wants to spend multi-millions and bury us in debt for something that seems to be functioning adequately?]**

I appreciate the recent expanded citizen involvement in City business and welcome more participation on these and all issues. Working together towards proactive solutions will strengthen our community please continue to remain involved. **[If Ald. Wsol really did “appreciate the recent expanded citizen involvement” he would support a referendum to get more input from those citizens. But he must think his constituents are dumb enough to buy this shameless spiel.]**

Frank Wsol
7th Ward Alderman
Chairman, Public Safety Committee
Park Ridge