



Plank: Grassroots Effort Seeks To Save Historic Roundhouse With Petition Drive

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WOOD RIVER - A grassroots movement in Wood River is asking residents to sign a petition to save the historic Roundhouse from being torn down by the city. After months of city planning sessions, the mayor and other city officials signed and submitted plans along with a grant application to the State of Illinois on January 21, 2020. While the grant was requested specifically for construction, the application included the full project plans. Among those plans were pictures of the historic Roundhouse with word bubbles stating, "Existing Roundhouse, Shelter and playground to be removed for site development."

Plans to demolish the historic Roundhouse were not explicitly mentioned in city council meetings. Documents were discovered by Wood River resident, Bill Dettmers, after filing a request under the Freedom of Information Act that clearly revealed the City's plans to demolish the iconic structure. These documents contradict a statement made by Wood River Mayor Cheryl Maguire who said in a March 2, 2020 Madison Record article that the grant application "does not say anything about demolition."

In the same article Maguire went on to say, "It was included to show what our possible future outdoor activities would look like. Nothing has been determined and there is no final decision."

Wood River resident Jeremy Plank who is part of the effort to save the Roundhouse said, "We've heard this tune before. When then City Councilwoman Maguire was running for mayor in 2017 she acknowledged citizens desires by saying, 'The majority of the citizens of Wood River feel strongly about keeping this pool as an integral part of the city's history.'"

Yet, just over one year after that election, the mayor and city council voted to demolish the Aquatic Center. City officials now say they have no plans to borrow the unfunded portion of the \$8 million estimated cost of a new recreation center. Plank who is a CPA and certified forensic auditor said, "Internal documents and deficit spending suggest that building a recreation center can be done now only by borrowing the remaining funds needed from other projects and by issuing debt."

Plank went on to say, "There were no final plans to remove the pool, until they voted to tear down the pool. They are again saying there are no final plans to remove the Roundhouse. Voters were dismissed once, but not again."

"Given the dismissive pattern, I wouldn't be surprised if the mayor does a complete pivot and pushes the city council to vote to save the Roundhouse as a way to suggest that was their plan all along," Plank said.

A grassroots Wood River group of citizens is circulating petitions for voters to sign. If you want to sign you can email saveroundhouse@gmail.com, saveroundhouse@hotmail.com or visit the Facebook page @saveroundhouse. Petitions are also available at local businesses including Illinois Cleaners at 13 Whitelaw Ave. Illinois Cleaners has been in business since 1930 and has operated almost since the grand opening of the historic Roundhouse, built and donated by Standard Oil Company in 1926.

Plank went on to say, “We are well on our way to getting the signatures needed to place this on the November 3rd ballot. We want to send a strong message to the city council. Contact us if you would like to sign.”

