



Letter To The Editor: Wood River Residents Urged To Vote Yes On Roundhouse Referendum

September 25 2020 9:14 AM



Many residents of Wood River recall in 2016 when the City Council discussed three different options for replacement of the Aquatic Center. According to reports, all options to repair the Aquatic Center would cost between \$7 to \$8 million. They said that it had outlived its useful life and the pool was not supported by charges for use.

After the spring 2017 elections for City Council and Mayor, the discussion then changed to exclude any talk of the three options for replacement of the pool to one centered

around the cost of \$105,000 to replace parts. We were told these repairs plus possible future repairs were just too high. The City just couldn't find the money for these immediate repairs, but somehow the Mayor and City Council voted unanimously and found funding to demolish the pool for \$110,000. Now, the City Council wants to build a new recreation center for \$7 to \$8 million. Sound familiar? They also want to borrow millions of dollars against the new sales tax hike revenues to fund the cost of the new building along with razing the historic Roundhouse. As a Certified Fraud Examiner and a CPA, this pattern of fiscal bait-and-switch in my hometown troubles me.

As has been well documented, the City submitted plans in January to demolish the historic Roundhouse as part of their IDNR grant application. Mayor Cheryl Maguire said on several occasions since then, that the Roundhouse demolition was added because the State encouraged them to, in her words, "enhance the application." Just a couple of weeks ago, the Mayor pushed through a resolution "guaranteeing" they wouldn't demolish the Roundhouse. On the surface, that seems like an encouraging move. However, the "guarantee" was written with two large exceptions. The Mayor and City Council wouldn't tear it down if, first, the Roundhouse was structurally sound and, second, it provided a vital use to the overall community. This sounds eerily like the arguments she and the City Council used when they tore down the Aquatic Center shortly after her election as Mayor. At this point, I find the Mayor's assurances suspect.

Regarding a new recreation building, what are the detailed plans for generating revenue from a new facility? In neighboring Roxana and East Alton, revenues don't even come close to covering costs. Roxana and East Alton have seen steep declines of 30 to 40% in recreation revenues. Costs are subsidized with real estate taxes by 80% in Roxana and 50% in East Alton. What does Wood River plan to do to make this new recreation center self-sustaining? The City is already operating with thin cash reserves and unbalanced budgets. Can taxpayers really afford this project? In November, voters have the opportunity to vote to save our historic Roundhouse and tell local government officials to start living within our means.

I urge you to join me in voting Yes on the Roundhouse Referendum.

Opinions expressed in this section are solely those of the individual authors and do not represent the views of RiverBender.com or its affiliates. We provide a platform for community voices, but the responsibility for opinions rests with their authors.