

Letter To The Editor: Mayor Brant Walker Provides Response To Alderman Velloff's Sunnybrook Information; Calls It The Silly Season Of Politics

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Today, Alton Mayor Brant Walker released the following statement in response to the verifiably false statements made by outgoing third ward Alderman Michael Velloff that were clearly meant to distort Mayor Walker's position on the proposed Sunnybrook housing development and divert attention away from David Goins' strong support for that taxpayer-subsidized project:

In a perfect example of the silly season of politics, Alderman Michael Velloff is distorting the facts related to my longstanding opposition to the proposed Sunnybrook housing development. Alderman Velloff's desperate tactics are solely meant to divert attention away from David Goins' strong support for the Sunnybrook project and the fact that Goins' top donors are partners in the project.

I have been consistent in my stance on Sunnybrook, going back to an op-ed that I wrote and released in June of 2018. That op-ed, published in our local media, read as follows:

Contrary to recent media reports, I do not support the proposed Community of Sunnybrook development in its current form for the following reasons.

When the project was first brought to my attention by representatives of EBJJ, Inc. nearly two years ago, it did not align with my administration's policy of promoting affordable single-family homeownership. Instead, the proposal included subsidized, multi-family rental housing.

Following discussions between myself, city staff, and representatives of EBJJ, Inc. to address my concerns with the original proposal for this project, I signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with EBJJ, Inc. in support of the project. That MOU included a stipulation that prospective residents of the project would have the opportunity to purchase their residence after 15 years, and it deleted all references to subsidized housing within the project. Based on this MOU, I sent a letter of support for the project to the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) on behalf of EBJJ, Inc.'s pursuance of low-income housing tax credits.

Low income as defined by IHDA regulations are people earning between \$12.00 and \$20.00 per hour.

In May of this year, it was brought to my attention that the application to IHDA for tax credits for this project included a proposal for various levels of subsidized housing within the development. A copy of that application was never provided to the City of Alton and had to be obtained by city staff from IDHA through the Freedom of Information Act.

At that time, I called the Executive Director of IHDA and withdrew my support for the project because the information contained in the developers' application for low-income tax credits did not align with the principles that were laid out in the MOU previously agreed to.

It has been and will continue to be, my stated policy goal to promote the development of single-family homeownership over subsidized, multi-family rental housing. Alton is

nearly 50% rental property and there is adequate affordable rental housing available. My administration, and the City Council, recently enacted a landlord licensing policy to ensure that rental property in our city is safe and does not diminish the property values of existing single-family homeowners.

Because the latest version of the proposal to develop the Community of Sunnybrook includes subsidized, multi-family rental units at the expense of single-family home ownership, I cannot support it at this time.

As anyone who is not blinded by personal and political animosity can see, nearly three years ago I explained to the MOU that Mr. Velloff is attempting to distort, and why I ultimately could not support the proposed Sunnybrook project. My opposition to the Sunnybrook project stems from its failure to include homeownership provisions and its reliance on more subsidized housing for Alton.

Mr. Velloff has also distorted the reasons for the lawsuit against the City of Alton filed by the developers of the Sunnybrook project. Rather than follow the City's zoning and building codes to obtain a permit for their project, the developers of Sunnybrook chose to file suit against the City.

I believe everyone should follow the same set of rules, put in place by our City Council, and that no special interest should receive special treatment. I can only assume that Alderman Velloff takes the opposite view given his statements regarding Sunnybrook's lawsuit. It is not only proper but in fact, necessary, to enforce our building and zoning codes equally to protect our property values.

Ultimately, Mr. Velloff's statements are nothing more than a desperate attempt to divert attention away from his mayoral candidate's support for more taxpayer-subsidized housing for Alton.

Facts are stubborn things, and passions often get in their way during a campaign. In the end, the facts are simple:

- I have been on record opposing the Sunnybrook development since June of 2018.*
- Sunnybrook's developers sued the City to avoid complying with the City's building and zoning codes.*
- David Goins is on record as supporting the construction of the Sunnybrook project and has confirmed that two of his largest donors are partners in the Sunnybrook project.*

Below is a letter from officials of the City of Alton to Audra Hamernik:

Audra Hamernik, Executive Director
Illinois Housing Development Authority
111 E. Wacker Dr., Ste 1000
Chicago, IL 60601

Dear Ms. Hamernik:

My administration and the City Council are writing to express our strong opposition and to withdraw the City of Alton's prior support for the Community of Sunnybrook development.

As the current details of this project have come into focus, we believe that this project fails to adhere to the vision we have worked to implement for Alton's long-term growth and revitalization. Our policy has been to encourage the revitalization of our neighborhoods through the development of single-family homeownership rather than multi-family rental units.

As you know, the Community of Sunnybrook Development is projected to be a multi-family, subsidized rental housing development. We recognize that adequate affordable rental housing is a necessary aspect of all community planning. However, there are currently in excess of 10 multi-family residential rental developments within Alton's city limits, as well as 249 units managed by the Alton Housing Authority at their four locations. Further, Alton has many privately owned rental properties. Most, if not all, of these rental units accept some form of subsidization.

The area proposed for Sunnybrook is adjacent to one of the most densely populated areas of Alton. There are literally an abundance of low to moderate income rental units already established in that immediate area with multiple vacancies always available for subsidized occupancy.

In fact, there is **NO** shortage of affordable housing, there are approximately 2600 rental units within the City of Alton. This means that our city is already approximately 50% rental, a percentage that is simply not sustainable in terms of creating long-term growth. Approximately 25% of housing within the City of Alton is considered multi-family.

Further, additional multi-family residential rental developments would depress the value of existing single-family homes and declining property values will reduce the city's revenue forcing reductions to vital services including public safety.

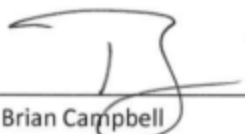
In closing, we, the undersigned officials of the City of Alton, are opposing the proposed Community of Sunnybrook and ask that the IHDA board reconsider and rescind its decision to offer \$1.9 million of HOME funding towards this project.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Mayor Brant Walker



Alderman Brian Campbell



Alderswoman Carolyn MacAfee



Alderman Michael Velloff



Alderswoman Tammy Smith



Alderman Charlie Brake



Alderman Dave Boulds



Greg Caffey, Director of Development & Housing

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