

Wood River City Council Backs Business Alliance With \$75,000 Despite Division

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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WOOD RIVER - The Wood River City Council on Tuesday approved a three-year \$75,000 commitment to financially support the “Wood River Business Alliance,” an Illinois Main Street organization formerly known as Wood River Economic Development. The final vote was cast after much discussion and debate, when the organization’s legitimacy was called into question by community members.

The item appeared on Tuesday’s agenda as a “resolution offering financial support for the next three years to the Wood River Business Alliance, a Main Street Organization, as submitted by the City Manager,” Steve Palen. As [previously reported on Riverbender.](#)

[com](#), the city's financial obligation to the organization amounts to \$25,000 per year for three years, totaling \$75,000.

The item had been tabled twice by Councilman Bill Dettmers - once on Dec. 18, 2023 and again on Feb. 5, 2024 - in an attempt to give local businesses in and out of the organization more time to "heal their differences." Community members have made public comments for and against the city's financial support of the organization during the past few City Council meetings, with some calling into question certain aspects of the Wood River Business Alliance.

[On Dec. 18, 2023](#), before the item was tabled, city officials originally considered "a Letter of Intent with Wood River Business Alliance" to join Illinois Main Street and financially support the organization for three years. Kristen Burns presented herself as a representative of the Business Alliance and shared more about the organization at that meeting - but at the time, there was no organization named the "Wood River Business Alliance," because the official paperwork to change the corporation's name hadn't been filed with the state.

One local resident, June Gibbs, drew attention to this fact at a Wood River City Council meeting on Feb. 5, 2024 - one day later, the organization filed the paperwork needed for the name change. According to the Office of the Illinois Secretary of State, "Wood River Economic Development" now uses the active assumed name "Wood River Business Alliance."

Documents from the Secretary of State's Office indicate that "Wood River Economic Development" was established as a not-for-profit corporation on Sept. 23, 2021 - however, neither "Wood River Economic Development" nor "Wood River Business Alliance" are listed in the [IRS's database of tax exempt organizations](#).

On Tuesday, Gibbs said the Wood River business community is still divided on the organization and accused council members of giving the money to their personal friends.

"Sadly, the city businesses are divided on this organization - the City Council is aware of it," she said. "They need to work on establishing business relationships first to achieve a positive result in the community - otherwise, this \$75,000 will be given to the chosen few of the councilmen's friends ... all this in the face of the citizens in this city. People see it and are sick of it."

Dave Landry spoke during Tuesday's public comment portion in support of the organization, stating that it was "registered, filed, perfectly legal, and should be

supported by the city." He said the organization has hosted successful events in the past and simply changed their name from Wood River Economic Development to Wood River Business Alliance.

Dettmers later said that the city's business community is still divided on the organization, adding he's gotten many requests to vote against the item. He also expressed concerns with the \$75,000 cost to the city, and wanted to ensure the organization wouldn't have the right to use the city's name in any of its promotional material.

"I've had people contact me - individuals and the business community - who are opposed to this application," Dettmers said. "I've had more requests to vote against this."

Two amendments to the item were later filed and passed prohibiting city employees, council members, and independent contractors hired by the city from simultaneously serving the city and being part of the Wood River Business Alliance.

The City Council then unanimously passed the resolution offering financial support for the next three years to the Wood River Business Alliance.

Part one of the Feb. 20, 2024 Wood River City Council meeting is available at the top of this story, while parts one and two are available on the [Riverbender.com Facebook page](#) or on [Riverbender.com/video](#).