

Concerns Raised, Rumors Debunked During Critical Exchange Between Wood River Residents And City Council

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
March 4 2024 9:38 PM



WOOD RIVER - An eventful public comment portion of Monday's Wood River City Council meeting saw a false Facebook rumor debunked, concerns raised over the

economic viability of the city's [new Rec Center](#), and much more. One City Council member addressed certain claims made once public comments concluded.

Pastor Dave Landry criticized Councilman Bill Dettmers's financial decisions since being elected despite campaigning as a businessman. Landry claimed Dettmers has cost the city thousands of dollars in attorney fees from Dettmers suing the city - a decision Dettmers later explained.

"You ran for City Council on being a businessman, making you the most qualified in dealing with financial affairs for the City of Wood River," Landry said. "Yet going back in time, you sued the City of Wood River not once, but twice while running for City Council, costing the city thousands - or rather, the taxpayers of Wood River - in attorney fees in one of those lawsuits.

"Nobody forced your hand. It was your decision - and by the way, both lawsuits, you lost. They were dismissed with no merit by a judge."

After Landry concluded his comments, Dettmers asked him if he had possession or personal knowledge of any documents related to the alleged attorney fees; Landry replied he had no such documents. Dettmers then asked if he had ever *seen* any documents related to the alleged attorney fees, to which Landry said he had not "seen them yet."

Dettmers later said City Manager Steve Palen has never discussed the cost of any legal fees with him. Councilman Jeremy Plank has [previously stated](#) that the city paid "very little" in legal fees related to Dettmers' lawsuit because it was "taken care of through insurance."

One of the lawsuits in question concerns the city's Rec Center, which [officially opened last month](#). One resident said that since the majority of Wood River citizens voted against building the Rec Center prior to its construction, it's not their fault if it fails.

"Several years ago, most in our community opposed the building of the Rec Center," she said. "Former council administration failed to address residents' concerns, yet it continued - even after the 2-1 non-binding vote against the Rec Center, it went forward ... the majority of questions fell on deaf ears.

"We now have residents coming forward and suggesting if this Rec Center fails, it will be our fault. If some don't campaign for supplemental funding, it's our fault - sorry, but you cannot have it both ways. It's built. If it cannot be financially profitable, it is not my fault, it is not other residents' fault."

Mike Anderson asked City Council members to address a rumor he saw on Facebook that they were allegedly planning on tearing down the Roundhouse. He asked City Council members to raise their hands if they were “tearing down the Roundhouse” - nobody raised their hand. Anderson then asked the public to stop spreading false rumors online.

“Rumors are terrible and that’s the problem in this city,” Anderson said. “That’s never been the truth, they have never said they were tearing down the Roundhouse.

“We all live in Wood River, we all deserve better - *we* do,” he continued, motioning to the public. “I don’t care if you agree with me or not, we all deserve better. This is getting ridiculous.”

He then looked directly at the City Council members and said: “It’s a shame when I hear people at my work laughing at you guys - they’re laughing. We don’t need an agenda of revenge, we don’t need to smear each other, we don’t need businesses run out of town. We need unity, we all live in Wood River, and if you don’t feel the same way, you should step down from the council.”

Dettmers responded to some of the comments made by providing more context into the lawsuit he filed against the city concerning the binding referendum vote on the Roundhouse prior to its construction.

“It’s disappointing that people come up here and make comments that are absolutely inaccurate and mislead the public as to what’s happened within this city,” Dettmers said. “In February of 2020, I discovered that the city had changed the 1% sales tax language /referendum to something that was not allowed by state statute. I asked the city numerous times to change the ordinance back to what the people approved in the 1% sales tax.

“Also in February of 2020, I learned that the city had decided they were going to use the 1% sales tax to build the Rec Center - unfortunately, state statute prohibited the city from using the tax to pay for the Rec Center. I repeatedly asked over a two-year period for the city to change their position. After the city voted down the opportunity for the citizens to have a vote on a binding referendum for a bond to approve the Rec Center, the city then forced through the Rec Center against the people’s wishes.

“The city refused to meet with me three times. As soon as I filed my lawsuit, the city then immediately changed its ordinance back to what the referendum was ... but the city maintained its position that it could use the 1% sales tax to pay for the construction of

the Rec Center. The judge sided with the city, which I believe was a mistake, because the state statute clearly said you cannot use the money because a rec center would not qualify as public infrastructure.”

Dettmers added: “I ran for office and was elected to bring change to how the city operated and to provide oversight to municipal operations ... I will continue to perform my duties as required by law.”