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Local News

THE JOURNAL & TOPICS NEWSPAPERS | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2007

Budget Meetings An Enlightening Experience

Editor, Journal:

Over the course of the last four to six weeks I have had the good fortune to make time in the calendar to attend the various Council budget meetings and an Economic Development Committee meeting. As a result, a few observations are, I believe, in order.

The budget hearings were most enlightening. The city staff came to the process with a proposed budget (that's their job) which contained a compendium of "target requests" (that's a wish list for more stuff and more staff) and a compilation of "revenue enhancements" (that's city speak for tax increases). After several, sometimes contentious, meetings the target requests were lightly trimmed but the staff walked away with about 98% of what they wanted. An interesting note was that an original allocation of \$7.5 million for the city to buy property in 5 Corners TIF was removed one week (with almost all aldermen and the mayor saying this TIF is to be "developer driven") only to be substituted the next week with a \$3.5 million request for the same purpose! Fortunately the Council and the mayor held firm and that request was removed also.

One could reasonably ask: who's running this place, Council or staff? I posed this question to an alderman in the hallway after the final meeting. The answer came in a roll of the eyes and a resigned shrug. That body language spoke volumes without saying a word.

On December 12th I attended a meeting of the Economic Development Committee (EDC) at City Hall. The purpose of the meeting was to review a preliminary report from the consultant hired to recommend development of the 5 Corners TIF. The consultant's presentation was, as expected, very preliminary and focused on issues regarding the railroad grade crossing and how that might impact the convenient accessibility a large retail development requires. It was not the specifics of the presentation that left a lasting impression. It was the fact that this issue was even being discussed in this place, at this time and in this country. The real purpose of this EDC meeting is to attempt to facilitate the governments' desired economic plan through a centralized, command bureaucracy. This economic model was tested for 80 years in the former Soviet Union and it collapsed; it just doesn't work. Our EDC is but a minor-league version of all the failed politburos of the past who every year issued a new five year plan.

As the consultants laser pointer danced around the TIF map on the wall and discussion was had on what properties had to go and what could be moved here or there, or whatever; I couldn't help thinking that all of these nice, pleasant, well intentioned people were at a high stakes poker table with other peoples deeds in the deck and they had no "skin" in the game. Also interesting to note was that no one at the table ever mentioned the fact that the citizens of this city rejected this TIF by a margin of 4 to 1 in a free and fair vote. That's sad, really sad, that the concept of Liberty has no pride of place in the public forum of a Constitutional Republic. The line to sign up for your "party" card forms on the left.

Dion F. Kendrick, Des Plaines

All Kids Program Provides Care

Editor, Journal:

Thanks to the All Kids health insurance program, ten-year-old Lisa is looking forward to a happy and healthy new year.

When Lisa's dad lost his job and his family's health insurance several months ago, he found two new jobs- both without benefits-and Lisa could not get treatment for her asthma. Lisa's health worsened, her asthma attacks increased, and her family grew desperate. Fortunately, the family heard about All Kids, the new Illinois program that offers health coverage to every child in the state. With sliding scale premiums and co-payments, All Kids allows Lisa's parents to take their daughter to a doctor on a regular basis, and not the emergency room when crises occur. Lisa is just one child. There are thousands like her in Cook and Lake counties. Thanks in large part to the support of Senator Susan Garrett and Representative Elaine Nekritz, Illinois was the first state in the nation to cover all children. The noise of the current Springfield battles should not obscure the history of cooperation and leadership that produced and maintains the program and enables hundreds of families in Cook and Lake counties to get the care they need.

John Bouman, President, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

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