

A Little More Self Respect Please

Written by

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At the end of the day, you either have your self-respect or not. The degree of one's own self-respect will inevitably dictate the level of respect given by others. This holds true for a lot of things, including city leaderships.

Elected officials learn the hard way that by failing their constituents by acquiescing to special interests while in office, they are less respected by the very special interests benefiting from that failure. Most of these politicians eventually find themselves out of office and out of favor with everyone, including the people for whom they abdicated their integrity.

For elected individuals and their staff, decisions should focus first on the benefit/cost ratio to the constituency. Based on that relationship, negotiations should proceed to find the best possible outcome for all parties. It is simple and reasonable, and leaves self-respect intact.

We all know that bullies bully wimps, and the more concessions a bully gets, the harder it bullies next time. The line is always being re-drawn. Such is the case, more often than not, with Davenport's leadership, especially the mayor, many aldermen, the administrator, and many managing staff.

Last year's development agreement between Davenport and the Isle of Capri (IOC) to build a casino hotel on Davenport's downtown riverfront is a perfect example of political and administrative wimps caving to the bullying demands of IOC. No amount of reason, logic, or science could move the majority of these wimps to perform the smallest amount of due

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diligence on behalf of Davenport residents. The IOC's own studies warned against the financial feasibility of the project, only to be summarily ignored by both parties.

Regardless, science as it relates to finance won in spite of the fast-tracking and undermining of the public process, leaving the city leadership looking like feckless amateurs, and the public seething with resentment and understandable fear over the outcome of the next proposal from IOC.

What seems incredible is that IOC would not have taken the steps to engage in a market study prior to all the bullying it underwent to secure a development agreement that made no financial sense whatsoever. The competition it faces with Riverside's new casino and the upgrade of Jumer's Casino Rock Island comes as no surprise, yet that is how it appears with the backpedaling going on now.

Bettendorf is not immune, either, to what seems like reckless disregard for the deals already on the table, including the financial commitments both cities have become dependent on.

If history is the guidepost, somehow IOC will be rewarded for its abdication, while taxpayers will bear the penalizing financial brunt - all because our leadership is miserably inept at negotiating. No one, including DavenportOne, recognizes a leveraged position when confronted with one, nor is there confident navigation of all the complex legal and financial issues in so many private/public development deals. But even when the work is done for them, most of the aldermen and mayor ignore such information. In the end, fear and confusion are the basis for so many fast-tracked back-room decisions foisted on the public by Davenport's mayor and the majority of aldermen.

Now comes Cingular with a value proposition that, if negotiated properly, could have made Cingular a hero in this town. Instead, the company will be viewed as another bully, taking far more than it is giving. So much discontent is bred because the knee-jerk response by Davenport's council is to give whatever is asked without a scintilla of due diligence or introspection on behalf of taxpayers, who will not only front-load this development, but will forgo the benefit of property taxes when they are the most lucrative. Once again, it is highly likely that the builder of this facility will be the beneficiary of any tax increment financing.

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Development in the guise of increased tax bases has become a game of chicken; the more chicken the city, the more profitable for developers. The net result to cities is a marginal increase in tax base, if any, when compared to the offsetting expenses cities incur by utilizing tax increment financing, such as interest on debt it incurs up front, so it can turn around and loan the builder money for the project at a much reduced interest rate.

Meanwhile, oversight as to whether Cingular actually employs 500 people with an average wage of \$9.50 per hour will be left to the public, as well. Rarely, if ever, are those recipients of governed tax dollars held accountable to the rules of the subsidy. So taxpayers end up covering the gaps these deals almost always leave.

Cingular will take what it can, as will the developer of this site. Unfortunately, taxpayers are forced to take whatever a small-minded, short-visioned leadership deals them in for. It is hard to live with knowing that, with a little self-respect on the parts of five more aldermen (Howard, Brooke, Dumas, Frink, Barnhill) and Mayor Winborn, we could all be winners.