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In an unprecedented act, Alderman Sherwood, with the support of Aldermen Moritz and Brown, pulled a power play that reinstated City Attorney John Martin with sanctions after Martin had proffered his resignation. There was no process involved. The resignation should have been discussed during an executive session because it was a personnel matter, then voted on by the entire council before any action, sanctions or otherwise, was taken. This was a deliberate undermining of the authority of the acting city administrator and the hired consultant, not to mention the rest of the council who had a right to be heard on the issue. This is just one more betrayal by Alderman Sherwood of the platform upon which he ran, and the list appears to be growing.

It will be interesting to see how and which aldermen defend any support of the rezonings of approximately 84 acres north of 53rd Street and east of Elmore for a new Super Walmart and Home Depot, two big box retail developments currently being considered by the council on behalf of THF Realty. Along with these rezonings are two petitions from THF for creating Self-Supporting Municipal Improvement Districts (SSMID) to pay for $3.8 million in infrastructure improvements that will allow traffic to flow smoothly in and out of the Super Walmart and Home Depot properties.

(It should be noted that arguments against rezoning a meager 10 acres from agriculture to commercial for small developer Niky Bowles, Cypress Point Developers, aren't even mentioned when it comes to the big retailers petitions, such as traffic congestions, buffer zones, population growth and commercial sustainability. This would suggest a clear prejudice in these instances of rezoning and should be more carefully examined.)

It should be noted that there has never been a SSMID created for undeveloped land, where there is a sole owner of the entire district that is a for-profit entity, and where the SSMID is in effect for 35 to 38 years. The original intent of the state law was to allow consenting owners of multiple properties within a declared area to join and be taxed over and above the levied property taxes to create a fund for future improvements of their neighborhood through a rebate of those additional taxes paid. There are currently three SSMIDs in Davenport: the Harrison Street Hilltop SSMID, the East Village of Davenport SSMID, and the Downtown Davenport

SSMID. All three of these SSMIDs have as their trustees a non-profit entity that receives and distributes the funds according to a set of rules imposed on how the funds can be spent, which is spelled out in the original petition. Normally, a board is set up that represents all the property owners and it has the authority to decide how the SSMID fund should be spent. In the case with THF, there is no board because there is only one property owner. However, in the future, if THF should sell any of its land, any future owners would be held to the liability of the additional SSMID tax, which could make the property undesirable for future sale because the taxes are burdensome compared to land elsewhere. But this might be exactly the condition that THF is trying to create. It is also of some interest as to how the tax rebates flow back to THF because they will supposedly be paid by the users, meaning Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and any other lessees; therefore it begs the question as to the nature of the rebate, financially speaking.

It is no secret that Wal-Mart has a long and less-than-desirable history in some communities where it locates. Jobs are usually part-time, lower wages, no benefits, and their presence has caused many mom and pop shops to close their doors because they cannot compete with the buying power of a huge retailer such as Wal-Mart. Home Depot has appeared in tandem with many Wal-Mart development efforts. Many feel this is the price of progress. But it goes beyond the issue of competition. In the case of Wal-Mart relocating its store just blocks up the road to 53rd Street, there is the issue of sprawl in its extreme. There is the issue of planned obsolesce with the current store, which Alderman McGivern has suggested the city purchase after it has sat vacant for two years. In fact, a contract is already drafted for consideration of such a proposal (this looks more like a bailout of some sort on taxpayer's backs). That, coupled with locating Home Depot next door, and the current council's consideration of an additional 116 acres owned by Jersey Farms (attorney Steve Schalk and associates) and nearby property owners in the same sector, we are facing nearly 300 acres of residential and commercial development, all of which will continue to funnel onto 53rd street. We already have an extremely negative situation relative to traffic there as it is. This will only serve to congest, endanger, and potentially drive business away from the area as a result.

The knee-jerk solution to the traffic issue appears to be that the city should consider putting 67th Street through to take the pressure off 53rd Street, which would mean an additional $5-$8 million in taxpayers' money to accommodate only three to four developments that this community may not be able to sustain. The residential component of the Jersey Farms development would mean 110-plus residential units that would require city services from an already stretched budget and overburdened public works department.

This is the real litmus test, folks. The current council ran on the issue of containing urban sprawl and uncontrolled, unplanned development, especially Aldermen Sherwood and Moritz (recall that Moritz was actually a named plaintiff in CURV versus the City of Davenport over the development of 53rd Street property that the city owned, a role that she attempted to abdicate once she was elected). These rezoning petitions need to be considered as a whole, not only as individual rezoning requests because the aggregate rezonings will overburden the city in terms of services and infrastructure needs that we are unprepared to deal with. The developer will not account for all of it. If this council approves any of these rezonings, such action would constitute a green light for the developments to proceed—albeit in direct violation of the will of the people when they voted these men and woman in. The public hearings for all these

rezonings will take place on Monday, March 5, at 4:30pm in council chambers. To further create confusion, the rezonings are also listed on the Community Development Meeting's consent agenda for Thursday, March 1, at 4pm. This means that these rezonings have the potential of not even being discussed at the committee level, where they should be questioned in great detail before moving forward. It is up to the public to hold the Community Development Committee and the entire council accountable for this potential urban travesty. There is a website that tells the story of how Wal-Mart has approached development in communities that is a must read for all of us: www.sprawl-busters.com. Consider this need-to-know information.

The real questions that need to be addressed here involve need. Can we sustain the development of 300 additional acres of top-grade soil, the finest in the world? Is it a community priority to build another road north of town to accommodate a few at the expense of the many? Where will the residential buyers come from when we have demonstrated stagnant growth in the Quad Cities? The City of Davenport's own consultants for the sewer study showed an alarming pattern of expenditures to growth, predicting a 25-percent land absorption rate over the next ten years, compared with a population growth of only 2.5 percent for the same period. The math shows that we don't have the population to absorb the development, so this means the city will have to rob from Peter to pay Paul. In other words, the new homebuyers will come from other neighborhoods, so there is no tax gain, only displacement. The commercial users will come from other areas of the city, so no gain there, either. This is how cities deteriorate and is a prime example of poor planning. We have an opportunity right now to plan for these eventualities, and make smarter land use decisions. We must make sure our elected officials respect this.

The real estate developers realize that the winds are changing across the nation, and most certainly in Iowa. Right now there is a land use bill being considered at the Iowa Legislature that will help establish a stewardship of our land, will require cities to plan as a whole within a countywide context, and generally recognizes the enormous value that Iowa farmland has as our most important resource. This is creating an almost desperate move to get as many development projects underway as possible before resistance becomes too costly. There is a saying on the streets I heard recently that developers bought this current council for two hamburgers and a soda each, the cheapest price in years. Let's prove them wrong. Let's insist that this council stand for sustainable growth and help them accomplish this goal.