

## Mayor and Aldermen Agree to Take the High Road

Written by Kathleen McCarthy  
Tuesday, 01 August 2000 18:00

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They say that people with dysfunctional behaviors that are destructive usually have to hit rock bottom before they are willing to admit they even have a problem, let alone take the steps to change. Such is the case with the Davenport's City Council. They have hit the proverbial bottom with the last incident between Alderman Sherwood and Mayor Yerington during last week's Community Development Committee (CDC) Meeting. Yerington made an executive decision to remove Sherwood as chairman of the CDC because of Sherwood's apparent unwillingness to communicate with him on committee matters. It was the culmination of in-fighting between the two politicians that began during the election because Yerington would not endorse the Democrat Party's slate of candidates. Yerington's reasons for withholding his endorsement were reasonable. Several of the races had two democrats running against each other, both of whom were friends or colleagues of Yerington's. He chose to stay out of the fray at a time when there was much inner conflict between the New Democrats and the old guard, the Central Committee. But that was only the beginning in a succession of continued incidences that further drove a wedge between Sherwood and Yerington—a situation that was never mitigated by the other aldermen, but was instead fueled by the same lack of communication on most of their parts, as well.

Last Thursday saw the situation come to a head. Tempers flared, accusations were hurled, and stands were taken by both gentlemen that resulted in the potential resignation by Sherwood if the community didn't back him in his attempts to remove Yerington from office. Not a very savvy political position on Sherwood's part, as evidenced by the huge support that poured forth from the public for Yerington. However, there was no small measure of support of Sherwood by his fellow aldermen. In the end, the Mayor chose to take the high road and, with the encouragement and support of the rest of the council, Yerington made the decision to put things right, once and for all.

Yerington has agreed to allow Sherwood to remain as chairman of the CDC, as long as communication lines open up and the Mayor is kept informed. In turn, the aldermen have agreed to impose a system by which all the committees will report to Yerington on a weekly basis so that he is kept apprised of all the actions, pending actions and issues that each committee is dealing with. This gesture is an olive branch that suggests that the Mayor is taking responsibility for his part in the friction between the two individuals, and rumor has it Sherwood is responding in kind.

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Recent critical events have led up to the present opportunity to put the petty in-fighting, the hormonally driven egomania, and the deceptive political games behind this council and get back to business. If anything, a loud and clear message has been sent that the people are watching, and they are less inclined to stand for self-interest over community interest than ever before—a wake-up call that we will not tolerate back-biting politics. As Senator John McCain said in his recent speech during this week's Shadow Convention in Philadelphia, we will no longer accept "damage control as progress." This council needs to get information and answers from the source, not from each other's hearsay, an all too common communication problem with this council.

The truth is that we, as a community, have expectations of this council, the first and foremost is to communicate, get along, and support one another, which unequivocally includes the Mayor. No exceptions. If the public actually scrutinized the planks of the platforms these aldermen ran on, they would find this council woefully lacking in what has been delivered upon so far. On the other hand, Yerington has proven time and again that he is "the people's mayor." It is time for the aldermen to also become the people's council. Hopefully, now that the pressure cooker has finally blown, the release alone will make room for healing and re-establishing relationships between aldermen and the mayor. It is now or never.

One last observation during Monday night's Committee of the Whole meeting. It was nothing short of vindictiveness on Alderman McGivern's part, when he helped organize neighbors against the rezoning of his own 6th Ward constituents, Niky and Tom Bowles, property in an effort to stall a council vote on the matter. This is not to say that the Windsor Crest neighbors surrounding the Bowles' property do not have a legitimate concern about rezoning property near their own residential development from agriculture to commercial. I would be right by their side if my home were located in their neighborhood. Even Bowles agrees with their concern, and is sympathetic to their cause. This, however, is not the point of contention with McGivern, who is mean-spirited and living in a vacuum if he believes for a minute that he is not entirely transparent. The fact is that the Windsor Crest neighbors who are protesting are not within the 200 ft. requirement area for protest, nor are they within the time limit of such protest, which passed nearly a year ago. At the time of the Bowles' zoning application, there was zero protests from the neighbors who were within the 200ft protest boundary, who actually received letters from the city notifying them of the potential rezoning. The Windsor Crest neighbors who organized over the weekend are residents who are not directly adjacent to the Bowles property (they are actually about 300-400 ft away) and are outside of the protest area. This in no way invalidates these homeowners' concerns. Their argument against commercial zoning of the nearby property has substantial merit and deserves consideration. Unfortunately, by Iowa law, their protests are not able to figure into the equation for determining the rezoning issue. In fact, the neighbors appear to have a far better chance of getting adequate buffers and green space negotiating with Bowles than most other property owners, let alone the city, because Bowles is sensitive to privacy and separation issues between mixed uses of land and has demonstrated her willingness to comply with such measures through conditions imposed on the rezoning. And it should be noted that it was Windsor Crest's own developer, Rob Fick, along with his attorney and partner in ownership of the land directly adjacent to Windsor Crest, Steve Schalk, who originally applied for the commercial zoning that Bowles is now trying to see through.

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But all that aside, it is the underhanded tactics of alderman McGivern that should be despised. His agenda to circumvent Bowles is obviously personal because he previously admitted to being in favor of the zoning prior to Bowles' public criticism of his unprofessional treatment of her at City Hall. According to Bowles, when McGivern submitted the Windsor Crest neighbors' letter of protest at last weeks Community Development Meeting, he included names of residents who knew nothing about the protest. His behavior is thoroughly disgraceful and should be sanctioned.

But even more importantly, McGivern's actions must now stand as precedent for allowing any and all neighbors of all properties, regardless of their proximity outside the 200ft. protest area, to be allowed to come forward and express their objections for any rezoning applications. Nor should there be a time limit for these protests. And this council, who stood by and allowed the protest for the record, a collective protest that arguably persuaded certain aldermen to vote against the zoning, should be held to this precedent, as well. Not a peep should be heard from any of them when the next organized neighborhood comes before them on a zoning issue. Let it be known that this council accepts any and all protests, as evidenced by McGivern's actions, and that any alderman can organize neighbors beyond the protest boundaries for the purpose of protesting zoning.