

## Letter to the Editor: Waterfront Misinformation

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By [Door County Pulse](#), [Peninsula Pulse](#) – November 20th, 2015

With the Westside Redevelopment Hotel Project currently on hold because of a lawsuit filed in federal court by the Friends of Sturgeon Bay Public Waterfront, I thought this might be an opportune time to clear the air regarding the matter. I have been struck by how much misinformation is out there in the community and on the blogosphere, but we live in a time when many people too easily jump to conclusions and others, for reasons of their own, are interested only in muddying the waters in hopes of confusing people even more.

The suit that was filed is *not* for the financial gain of the plaintiffs, as some have rather cynically suggested. It is, rather, looking for clarification concerning the Public Trust doctrine of the Wisconsin state Constitution. The plaintiffs contend in their suit that the City of Sturgeon Bay (through the actions of our city council) are attempting to sell a parcel of land to a private party that rightfully belongs to the citizenry of the entire state. This parcel on the west side includes filled lakebed beyond the “Ordinary High Water Mark,” and the plaintiffs seek a judgment protecting the public’s ownership of this property. Selling it, they contend, would be tantamount to selling a chunk of state park land for the profit of a private business concern. Public land should remain public land, even if that land was once erroneously placed in the hands of private parties before returning to the public trust.

Complicating this matter is the controversial hotel project that a private developer hopes to place on this parcel, which the city intends to sell him through a no-interest contract sale. I am personally opposed to the current city-approved plan of his hotel, for aesthetic reasons if nothing else, but the lawsuit isn’t about the hotel since the developer could render the suit moot by moving his construction to land not under dispute. He might have to revise the scope and size of his project, perhaps cutting the footprint from its current configuration, but he could begin construction tomorrow if he and the city forfeited interest in developing the disputed piece of property.

I hope people in the community realize that this lawsuit will not bankrupt the city or enrich the plaintiffs, who have been unfairly characterized by some as carpetbaggers and turncoats. You may love the proposed hotel project or hate it, but the suit that is winding its way through federal court isn’t about this one building development on the west side of the city. It is about who owns the lakeshore – the public at large or private businesses interested in exploiting it for its profitability? That is why I not only support the suit but applaud those who have filed it on the public’s behalf. They truly are friends of the Sturgeon Bay waterfront.

Mike Orlock

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## **Article Comments**