

Your Letters: March 12

: 3/14/2016

NEWS

Wisconsin

This is where the Friends were

This is in response to the letter of March 2, asking “where were all the ‘friends’ when ...” in regard to Westside waterfront development plans. I’ll tell you where we were. We were earning a living, taking care of our kids, maintaining our homes, loving our community – and trusting that our officials were pretty much on the same page as we were and trying to plan things that would suit everyone.

When the first ideas for the former co-op property were put forward, we weren’t totally won over. I know I wasn’t. Here, I thought, was our chance to reclaim former private property and allow it to become public again so everyone could enjoy it, the waterfront, and the view. That’s the trend in cities these days. Filling the waterfront with buildings is an old model that’s falling out of favor. But, the first plans seemed to be a decent blend of two ideas, with enough compromise to please everyone at least a little.

It wasn’t until that hotel plan appeared on the newspaper’s front page, without warning, that people suddenly reared back and said, “Whoa! Now *that* is way more than we had hoped for. And as long as we’re saying that, here’s what we’d *really* like to see on that property.” That’s when we ventured to talk about park, about low profile, about things that we suddenly realized were not part of our officials’ game plans.

The city of Green Bay has said that if as many as 30 people show up at a council meeting about an issue, they see it as a sign for needed discussion. So, when hundreds showed up in Sturgeon Bay, and even more signed petitions, that should have been a clear signal to our officials that a line had been crossed.

“Hundreds” may or may not represent a majority, but they certainly are a red flag and represent more than we saw speaking up *for* the hotel proposal. And so what if we came to the table “late”? Does that make our concerns less worthy of note? Yes, many of the petition signers were from out of town – because they love our community and like to spend time here. Denigrating their signatures is like saying, “Come here and spend money, but don’t have an opinion about what you find when you get here.”

Yes, there’s a lawsuit now, and we all hate lawsuits. But when your officials put on blinders and ear plugs and forge ahead with what *they* want without any willingness to back up and rethink a plan that has obviously stirred up a lot of heartfelt, albeit late, concern, then other methods must be used to get their attention. (And in the process we learned that lakebed trust truly is an issue.)

We had hoped our council would act as the council of Eau Claire did when its original development plans, which included building on their riverfront, met with resistance. They listened to their citizens' concerns, over and over again, and compromise was reached.

So no, the ordinary citizen doesn't attend every meeting or voice concerns over every single issue as long as plans at least halfway seem agreeable. When we do protest, long and loud and persistently, it should be a sign that things need to be rethought. We citizens really would much rather work with you than butt heads.

Monica Sawyn