



From Councilman Steve Mandel www.stevemandel.com Email: stevemandel@comcast.net

Highland Park Theater discussion is tamed under current economic climate

March 3, 2010

While our hopes were high that we would have a new performing arts theater group rehab the Highland Park Theater after our purchase. That idea will have to be put on the shelf for the moment.

After sitting in on several Theater Reuse Advisory meetings over the past several months it seems that the consensus in the short term was to make the theater more presentable as a movie house and not currently move forward on a mass renovation. Suggestions were also made to make changes to the business model that could increase revenues for the movie venue.

I think on a parallel path we should make it clear to the Chicago Area Theatrical Community that Highland Park is willing to work with viable theatrical entities on renovating and promoting performing arts within this facility with the right partnership. We have a core downtown and population that is very theatrical friendly and would be a very supportive to an incoming theater company or operator.

Also, we need to see if there is interest in establishing a foundation for preservation of the Highland Park Theater in perpetuity since many of us old timers believe it is a cornerstone in our history and cultural fabric. **WELL... Time to hear from the City Council to see whats next!**

We need Change Now in HP Government

February 24, 2010

Mayor Belsky just announced his intention to run for a 3rd term. While I think his political rhetoric and values he speaks to is something I do strongly agree with, he needs to step aside and let another provide leadership for our community.

One of the major problems our mayor has had is his dependence on our City Manager David Limardi on dealing with issues and carrying out the policy and values of the City Council. It is up to the Mayor to be sure these values are carried out and there is full disclosure, cooperation, and subservience to the Council and the Community at large.

Unlike past Mayors Ray Geraci and Dan Pierce that I did also have the pleasure to serve with, this mayor does not seem to possess the management skills to control the City Managers conduct or passions on his personal preferences over those of the City Council. Thus we continue to get side tracked on issues important to many of us and head full steam ahead on issues important to the City Manager.

Mayor Belsky has given two full terms as Mayor and it is now time for new leadership. I am available to discuss this issue with anyone that is willing to talk about possible candidates for Mayor of Highland Park. My door is wide open and I ask for conversation on this subject as an election approaches us in 2011 for which the legal process will start in September of 2010. **Three Council seats and the Mayors seat will be up for election a little over a year from now and look forward to a debate about the best possible future for our community.**

Sustainability Recommendation from Environmental Commission

February 24, 2010

The Environmental Commission came in front of City Council and asked for staff to facilitate networking sessions with our business community to help **promote elimination of Styrofoam and plastic bag use.**

This proposal was enthusiastically endorsed by the City Council instead of the original bans proposed in the past. There was a concern that an outright ban would cause undue hardship on the business community at a time when current economic stress is very high.

I believe if we can achieve these sustainability goals through networking and education and will achieve the positive sustainable results we hope to accomplish. **I thank the Environmental Commission for a fine job in progress on these issues.**

Making it easier to Build More!

February 24, 2010

The City Staff is suggesting a streamline process to build structures that are not in compliance with our

current city code. Instead of going to the ZBA for a variance and appearing at a public hearing to build into the home setbacks from the street, a SPECIAL ZONING PERMIT could be attained from our staff after meeting a reduced set of standards.

Again, staff is suggesting we make it easier to create more mass into the dedicated open spaces we visually share with everyone and nature on our private properties. The current community rights do not put an undue burden on our private property rights and should be upheld to the strong standards currently in place. These standards protect our community character and the natural buffers around our homes.

I suggested to the City Council that if they think current laws that govern land use and building are unreasonably burdensome they should change the laws to support more build out of our homes. **I would however strongly oppose such legislation that would promote larger homes as I am opposing the Special Zoning Permits to make it easier to build out residential properties.** Only Councilman Levenfeld and Myself voted against moving forward on this proposition.

While we on the City Council are still hearing from residents that they are upset about large structures next to their property, new homes and additions blocking the sun from their residences, and increased flooding from adjoining properties, the majority of the City Council still pushes for more development..... **HELP!!!**

Time to take Cell Phones out of Drivers' Hands

February 19, 2010

When Aaron Wolff came in front of the City Council at the first Council meeting in February he requested for the seemingly 10th time that the City Council hold public hearings on banning cell phone use while driving. He has stated the obvious distraction and safety hazard that this has caused on our roads.

I responded that the time has come for us to take the step and move forward on this issue but was immediately and abruptly interrupted by Mayor Mike Belsky as he successfully cut me off from finishing my thoughts. Again the Mayor, showed disrespect and lack of courtesy toward City Council members and would not allow me to finish my thoughts on this issue.

While driving down Elm Street a few weeks ago a woman driving a huge SUV was chatting away on her phone while driving on the wrong side of the street. She headed straight at me and if I did not pull over into the parking spaces in front of Walgreen's we would have had a head on. Whatever the conversation she was having on that cell phone was too important for her to focus on driving properly.

I applaud our Representative Karen May on moving forward on a state wide ban of hand held cell phone use as Chicago and Winnetka have done. But just because Rep. May is proposing this law does not mean it will happen.

We have been leaders in the past on smoking, environmental, and land use laws prior to other municipalities or the state adopting those changes. The time has come to ban hand held cell phone use in Highland Park and look forward to a good discussion at the City Council.

Getting Along Should Not Silence Speaking Out!

January 10, 2010

Civility should always be maintained in venues of communications with our fellow man. We can always get more done if we treat each other with respect and listen to what others have to say on the subject of the moment.

Last week's Highland Park News stated that our budget process and results were right on target and that more civility was needed in our budget process..... or something to that effect.

With all due respect, the functionality of our government, directed by our City Manager David Limardi, has a lot of room for improvement. In my opinion, where we ended up in December on the budget could have been attained six months earlier. To say trying to get a balanced budget was like pulling teeth is an understatement..... and still is!

Now I have been told we will not start our budget process until sometime in March. Let me remind everyone that we are still about 1.5 million in the hole for fiscal 2010. That is about \$.75 million coming out of reserves and \$.75 million of diminished spending for infrastructure.

While the last holdouts that voted against this past budget were Nancy Rotering and I, Scott Levenfeld held with us almost to the end. Others on the City Council had signed along with voting yes on the budget because the Mayor asked them. Maybe there were 2 or 3 Council members fully comfortable with the 2010 budget.

The Mayor, upon a simple request, moves legislation because of his enormous seemingly blind respect from a majority of the City Council. It is clear to me that nothing of prominence gets done on this City Council without his blessing. Again, this is said with all civility and respect.

We can make these very hard decisions and maintain civility. We can talk nicely to each other, disagree and discuss drastic government changes to balance the budget without being characterized as reckless or detrimental to our community that we all love.

Let's not hesitate to speak out on "constructive thoughts" of living within our means and maintaining a sustainable community for our residents. To do less can create hardships that can drive long time residents from our town and that is unacceptable to me. Civility and Sensibility must rule in 2010....

New Tree Ordinance and Ban on Phosphorus

December 16, 2009

Great Progress from our Environmental Commission with the leadership of Bert Frey, past chair and just announced Environmental KING of the year, on providing more protection to our community forest. This ordinance further protects trees larger than 20 inches, better construction planning on effects of trees on and off construction property, and larger fines for non-compliance.

Also, after I sent the issue of a Phosphorus ban to the Environmental Commission, they held a public hearing, did the research, and brought us a great ordinance that further protects our waterways and environment from this harmful soil additive. Since there is naturally so much phosphorus in our soils this ban was a no brainer and had no opposition.

Get up and Stand up For Open Space and our Environment

December 15, 2009

Reflecting on the past several votes of the City Council where I was voted down by a very large majority concerning moving forward the Open Space District and a Lot Coverage Ordinance, we must now organize and activate the majority of citizens that want Highland Park to become a more sustainable community.

If this City Council was around in the 90's we would have not bought the Highland Park Country Club, saved the 38 acre wetland preserve, created Founders Park, or reduced the density on several zoning districts cutting future development in half.

While I have been trying to work with this City Council and the Mayor on continuing the quest towards a sustainable city, we continue to revert back to old slogans and practices that will continue to raise our carbon footprint, increase runoff and pollution, and occupy more of our natural environment with structures and cement.

It is time for all of us tree huggers to unite and say we are not going to take it anymore and want to see this government start sustainable planning and practices for the future. We need to organize a group and start a political action committee to promote the environment and sustainability in Highland Park so we can get some movement on these issues.
WHO'S IN?

I will continue to push for an open space district along the Skokie river basin and work with our Mayor to re-focus the Council to achieve some positive results.

[Click here to read more of Steve's blog entries!](#)

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A copy of our report filed with the State Board of Elections and the county clerk is (or will be) available for purchase from the State Board of Elections, Springfield, Illinois, or from the county clerk County Building, 18 N. County St., Waukegan, IL 60085

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