From: Nicholas Davies
To: Finance Committee
Cc: Martinez-Rutherford, Dina Nina
Subject: Debt/spending for Breese Stevens
Date: Sunday, May 12, 2024 2:43:27 PM

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Dear Finance Committee,

Parks Superintendent Eric Knepp has a habit of doing massive favors for influential people at the city's expense.

Take, for example, the recently adopted plans for Olbrich North. These include a massive parking lot designed to be customer parking for a private business on public land and at public expense. This was negotiated behind closed doors with the owner of Garver Feed Mill, months before the public got to have any input into the process.

Now we have this vague proposal of $8 million in "improvements" to Breese Stevens, with the city responsible for half of that huge amount.

Was this similarly negotiated behind closed doors with someone influential? I don't know, because Mr. Knepp doesn't voluntarily disclose this. It would take an open records request--and weeks--to find out. Does Mr. Knepp personally get anything out of doing these massive favors for influential people? I don't know, because I don't have the authority to do the kind of investigation necessary to find that out. But Mr. Knepp certainly doesn't seem to be letting the appearance of impropriety get in the way of doing what he wants to do with Madison funds, and now that extends to even putting us in debt.

The explanation of the $8 million in improvements have been vague. Much more vague than other city departments are when requesting that the city take on debt for their projects.

Breese Stevens is old, but so what?
Breese Stevens is allegedly a money sink, and we could spend unlimited amounts there--then why spend money there now, as opposed to later? What happens if we don't make the improvements now?
What will $8 million get us? Why $8 million, and not 6, or 10?
Why is the city taking on debt for the improvements, when it's going to be folks like Frank Productions / LiveNation and Madison FC who reap the benefits?

The truth is, you're being asked to sign off on a grant proposal that was already submitted without your approval. And because the Parks Commission isn't in the habit of holding Eric Knepp accountable, it falls to you all.

I have no idea whether these improvements to Breese Stevens are worth taking on debt for or not, because there's been so little transparency in this process. Like writing a memo to the Parks Department on the day of their meeting, too late for the public to read ahead of time; that memo is still not attached to this item in Legistar.

I'm just wary of taking on debt for something completely undefined, and I'm looking for you

all to hold the Parks Department to the standards that other city departments consistently meet already.

Thank you,

Nick Davies
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