

Opinions

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Library Supporter's Criticism Pure Fiction

Editor, Journal:

Most people know by now there is a referendum on the November ballot asking the voters to approve an increase in their property taxes to increase funding for the (Park Ridge) Library over the level currently set by the city council.

There have been many letters to the editor over the past few weeks extolling the virtues of our library and urging residents to vote in favor of the referendum. I applaud the enthusiasm of the library's supporters, and if the referendum passes, I will be happy for them and will gladly accept the results.

However, some of the rhetoric in those letters sounds more like excerpts out of Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451." And like Bradbury's book, much of what is being written is pure fiction.

Normally I would just let it go, but there has been a disturbing pattern in these letters, of impugning the integrity of the aldermen. It has reached a point where I can no longer ignore it.

The most egregious example is a letter written by

Mary Ann Irvine (which was published in the Oct. 8 Journal), a former alderman who should know better. Ms. Irvine has essentially accused the members of the city council of being the firemen in "Fahrenheit 451," hell bent on burning books and destroying the library. It is time to set Ms. Irvine straight, along with the others who are attacking the character of the aldermen.

Ms. Irvine accuses the aldermen of dodging their responsibilities as elected representatives to adequately fund the library.

What Ms. Irvine forgets is that the aldermen represent all taxpayers, not just those taxpayers who want to see more funding for the library. In a time of spiraling property tax increases, this council has made it a mission to keep the city's share of property taxes as low as possible. To keep those increases as low as possible, the council has forced the city staff to tighten their belts, put off certain capital improvements, including further renovation of the police facility, and revamped its spending procedures, all in an effort to give the taxpayers a break.

When the council decided

last December to freeze the library's property tax levy at the previous year's level, it could have left it at that. Instead, the council acknowledged that a difference of opinion might exist, so it proactively initiated the referendum procedure.

But apparently, Ms. Irvine would rather not have the voters decide if they want to pay more property taxes for the library. I think she is wrong.

However, the most disturbing part of Ms. Irvine's letter comes when she charges that the council deliberately worded the referendum in a way that it would be doomed to failure. That is outright false, and Ms. Irvine should be ashamed for saying so.

Ms. Irvine was an alderman. Presumably she knows that language in a binding referendum must comply with state law. And as a former alderman, she should also know that the city council has a city attorney who advises it on state law.

In the case of the library referendum, the language of the referendum was discussed at no less than five meetings on May 21, May 27, July 14, July 21 and Aug. 4. Every single one of those meetings was open to the public, and the last four were televised live and the videos of the meetings were, and still are, available to watch on the city's website. It is painfully obvious that Ms. Irvine never attended or even viewed any of those meetings. If she had, she would know that the aldermen bent over backwards trying to frame a referendum question which was understandable and informative, but which still complied with state law as interpreted by the city attorney.

Don't vilify and attack the character of the aldermen who have given of their time to tackle our city's problems. It will not help get you any more votes in support of the referendum. It certainly is not helping you get mine.

Mayor David F. Schmidt
Park Ridge

Says Setting Library Levy Responsibility Of Aldermen

(Ed. Note: The following is a response to Mayor Dave Schmidt's letter printed to the left and read aloud at Monday's Park Ridge City Council meeting.)

Editor, Journal:

The mayor and I must have different philosophies about serving on the city council. My philosophy as an alderman was not "government by referendum." I believed we were elected to study each issue, learn as much as possible about the facts of the situation and alternatives, find compromise between differing opinions, and reach decisions for the welfare of the community as a whole, not pass basic decisions along to the citizens.

While I agree that some large bond issues should be submitted to a referendum, I believe a basic issue such as how much to levy for the library, is the responsibility of the city council. The city council has not elected to put to a referendum vote how much the citizens want to levy for city services.

Since I also served in the past as president of the library board, I understand the library budgeting process. The library board adopts a budget they feel is necessary to manage the library to their standards and they submit that budget to the city council. The council has the power to accept their budget request

or to reduce it, but they do have the responsibility to fund the library and levy a tax to reach that amount. I believe the council "dodged" that responsibility by asking the citizens to make the decision.

And I contend that they did mislead in the wording of the referendum. The first paragraph of the referendum erroneously says that the tax will "be increased from 0.150% to 0.386%," but it will actually be raised from the current 0.29% to 0.368% if the referendum passes. To my knowledge, the library levy has never been as low as 0.150%. That wording was evidently so confusing, they needed a second paragraph to explain it. The real issues isn't should our taxes be raised but should the money cut from the Library's budget be restored?

Although the council has eliminated more than \$550,000 from the library's budget since 2009 (this includes reduction in tax levy funding and elimination of \$100,000 in revenue sharing) we have not seen the city's budget reduced by that amount. Where have those funds gone? Not back to the people in the form of a tax reduction!

Perhaps the city council just wants to say, if the referendum passes, that they didn't raise taxes, the people did.

Mary Ann Irvine
Park Ridge

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