

What's mayor thinking?

The Northville Township Board of Trustees has apparently retained City of Northville Mayor, Chris Johnson's law firm to represent them in regard to the Citizens for Public Accountability and Responsible Development, CPARD, request for an inquiry into whether the township board adhered to the Open Meetings Act when it granted authority for Mr. Abbo, on the morning of July 29, at 8 a.m., to settle the REIS Northville Psychiatric Hospital complaint without public input.

The settlement has agreed to increase the retail portion of the development to 950,000 square feet, and beyond, almost the size of Twelve Oaks Mall. This new mall will only continue the exodus of businesses leaving downtown Northville for the more fertile ground of a mall which will provide comparable rent, accompanied by ample parking, Wi-Fi, and much higher shopper volume from residents of nearby Livonia and Detroit. The increase in traffic going along Seven Mile Road and Main Street will only be the shoppers heading east to enjoy the warmth and comfort of a nearby, dry and year-round mall of which the city will not receive any tax revenue from.

Mayor Johnson's law firm also offers to provide legal services to school boards through an organization called MAISL. The settlement agrees, as part of the Brownfield Plan, to allow the developer to capture school taxes, to help fund the clean-up costs, for the duration of the financing which could last a minimum 20 years and may span 30 years. The plan states, "the township will support owners request in writing to MDEQ and/or MEDC for the CAPTURE OF SCHOOL TAXES". The 19.3 acre school site is gone. It grants a property tax rollback, from \$15 million to a meager \$5 million, and requires the refund of the prior years of "overpayment" with interest. REIS currently contributes \$98,804 per year to the township, this would be reduced by one third under the settlement for the next 20-30 years, while we continue to provide police and fire protection and other services to the new mall. As we possibly move towards shared services, in order to reduce costs, this arrangement could become a white elephant for both municipalities. If this is a viable tax "capture" venture then why not publish the financial projections, with a payoff timeline, before it is approved?

It would seem if Mayor Johnson has decided to jump in and help row on this issue he would pick a boat that would benefit his city. Mr. Abbo approved the terms of the settlement without seeking consent from the citizens of Northville Township, the city, or the school board, and all will be affected. The \$1.8 million town square, parking improvements, and Wi-Fi will have the potential of becoming obsolete as downtown stores attempt to compete with a new indoor mall. This attempt has already been waged in Novi, with very limited success, as they try to recreate an "historic" downtown to lure shoppers away from the enclosed malls. Downtown Dearborn lost this battle to Fairlane Mall years ago.

Mr. Abbo insisted on rowing his own boat into the eye of the storm, while citizen groups like CPARD, and prior to them, Citizens for Northville, attempted to row the citizens, taxpayers and businesses of our neighboring communities in a new direction. We need dedicated and proven leaders in our township like Hermann and Gans. We need more creative solutions and open communications that will benefit all.

Mayor Johnson has done an excellent job during many years of dedicated service and it would be a disservice to his legacy for him to be known as "the mayor who helped bring the mall to Northville Township" and brought the demise of his city. A thousand new homes will help his city; hundreds of new stores and restaurants will not.

Steve Lomske, architect