

## **Village Manager Association of Oak Park**

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### **Sale of the Colt Building to the Village**

#### **Public Comments**

Tuesday, February 21, 2006

Presented by Bob Kane, President

Actions here speak louder than words – both in the pending actions of the Board of Trustees regarding the purchase of the Colt Building and 1145 Westgate as well as in the outpouring of concern from individuals and businesses in this community last fall. There is something being said here tonight... but what is the broader message being conveyed to our community? Are you truly listening to all the citizens?

The VMA believes in accountable and responsive government. This evening we have to ask ourselves, “Will the path that the Board is prepared to take us down benefit the Village as a whole?” We expect more from our elected representatives who hold the future of this community in their hands and in their decision making processes.

We want leaders who can take a visionary stand about sensitive and balanced growth and about building a healthy tax base for us all. What we are seeing now is a group being lead by an uncompromising, vocal minority. Courting these extreme ideas is a roadmap to no where.

The question of “Downtown Oak Park” is long standing. Over the years commissions and task forces and study groups and other Village Boards have all wrestled with the challenge of recreating it and make it a prime shopping destination once again. With the most recent plan developed with hours upon excruciating hours of citizen input – with careful analysis by consultants – with documented participation of historic preservationists – the Board was presented with a plan that doesn’t lend itself to cherry picking. Elements work in unison and fail as stand alone parts. We thank the Super Block Committee for their work to provide a plan that will enhance and unify our downtown.

In real tax dollars we are talking about 7.5 million for the Colt and Westgate buildings. These dollars are not likely to be reinvested here. Sadly, our schools, parks, this Village and other taxing bodies will now have to wait...and wait...and wait for more RFPs and more studies...and more negotiations to determine if and when something will come out of this selfish choice. The potential for lost revenue due to this irresponsible fiscal decision is staggering.

Oak Park does not exist in a vacuum. To think otherwise is foolhardy. To think that your actions tonight won't impact possible future developers and potential investors is both naïve and damning.

Citizens and other property owners should stand up and take notice...even if Downtown and the Colt Building and Westgate mean little to them individually.

As long as this Board continues to thwart appropriate development and build a reputation as difficult to deal with and as an untrustworthy bargaining partner, the tax burden will fall to the rest of us. Think about it.

The VMA feels the citizens of Oak Park deserve more and we will continue to expect – no, demand – more from this Board. We hope that you are listening this evening.