

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

### **Statement On The Sale of the Colt Building**

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#### **News Release**

February, 2006

The Village Manager Association (VMA) is extremely disappointed in the recent actions of the Village Board of Trustees regarding both the negotiations related to purchase of the Colt Building and 1145 Westgate and the impact that the purchase may have on the Village and other important taxing bodies such as our excellent schools. We believe that the actions of the majority of the Board are failing the citizens of the Village of Oak Park in significant and critical ways. There are a number of important points which need to be made and questions that need answers.

- The Taxman Group and their Focus Development partner have developed numerous projects in the Chicagoland area. Regardless of whether you like the style or architecture, the Taxman Group has been a developer that had confidence in Oak Park long before any others and the relationship has sustained permanent damage. The \$19.5 million dollars (or \$27 million including the proceeds from the sale of the Colt and 1145 Westgate) that the Taxman Group received from the sale of the Shops will likely not be reinvested in Oak Park. Let's see what happens.
- When Trustees meet and negotiate deals with their party officers involving policy decisions on Village acquisition of property and exclude both the public and the rest of the elected officials, there is cause for great concern. Discussions behind closed doors fly in the face of open and transparent government, but equally as important it casts a pall on the entire process.
- Likewise, the fact that any substantive negotiations were held begs the question: how could non-Trustees possibly have all the information they would have needed to hammer out a compromise? As all Board discussions since the last public meeting with the Taxman Group were held in Executive Session, it would appear that confidential information could have been shared. Was it?
- How is it that the recommendations from the Board-appointed DTOP Superblock Steering Committee can be cherry picked and still succeed? In other words, the opening of Marion Street was recommended in conjunction with the construction of a new street. Similarly, the location of the proposed parking structure also contemplated that new street. What now? And how will citizens be involved? Are we destined to hire more consultants, get more public input, and possibly end up with another recommendation to tear down

the Colt Building and add a new street? Isn't that a waste of taxpayer's time and money?

- Given the strong presence of preservationists on the DTOP Superblock Steering Committee that recommended against buying and rehabbing the Colt Building, how could the plan be deemed anti-preservation?
- To think that Oak Park exists in a vacuum is both naive and damning. Other developers, businesses, and investors are watching and listening. They will see or hear or talk about this turn of events and take their ideas, their money, and most importantly their potential tax dollar generation elsewhere. That is a huge loss for our schools, our parks, and all of us who depend on tax revenues.

The VMA hopes that all citizens will view this series of actions for what it was—a manipulated, closed process, which not only ignored the input of the community and its Commission members, but also flies in the face of any campaign promises made by the newly elected Trustees. The fallout of this decision to buy the two buildings, no matter the ultimate outcome, will be with us for a long, long time.