

Village Manager Association of Oak Park

Facts and Spin

Editorial

Facts are a funny thing. The NLC and VCA have consistently chastised over 50 years of Village Manager Association (VMA) village boards, yet seek to take credit for all of their accomplishments as demonstrated in their One View (August 9, 2006). While it is certainly healthy to have open and informative debates on the issues, those debates need to be grounded in factual accuracy. We respectfully submit that listed below are the facts – without the “spin”.

NLC/VCA Spin – This Village Board approved \$5.8 million in new spending to support business districts along Harrison Street., Chicago Avenue., Roosevelt Road., North Avenue., and Lake Street.

Fact – The actual amount is \$6.0M (\$1.2M for engineering and \$4.8M for streetscape improvements. While we believe the implementation of the various plans approved by previous VMA majority boards do need to move forward, **the current board may need to borrow** up to \$6.0M to implement these plans and our current debt load must be carefully managed.

The fact that the \$6.0M debt load could be handled within the current 2006 budget and beyond is in large measure possible because of the 2005 budget approved by former VMA President Trapani’s board, which came in at 95% of budgeted expenses and 102% of projected revenues. That 7% difference allowed our fund balance to remain at the 20% target encouraged by our financial advisors, and ensured our bond rating remained high. For the NLC and VCA to take credit for 2006 infrastructure momentum gives short shrift to previous boards fiscal prudence.

The current NLC and VCA board majority is not as fiscally prudent as past boards or as prudent as they would have us believe. Ask yourself a simple question – is it wise or prudent to spend anywhere from \$7.2M to \$10.0M on “saving” the Colt building?

NLC/VCA Spin – This village board expanded the Retail Rehab Grant Program previously available only in downtown to all village business districts.

Fact – While technically correct, the previous VMA majority board put this into motion during 2004/5 so that funds could be allocated in the 2006 budget. This is yet another example of expansion of a program created by a VMA majority board where the costs associated with the program’s expansion could be absorbed into the budget without a tax increase due to strong fiscal management of the 2004 and 2005 budgets. In addition, the many business district plans created by VMA majority boards allow for strategic and tactical investment with the goal in mind of expanding our sales tax base, creating the potential for the Village to reduce its share of your property tax.

But are our efforts regressing? Ask yourself a simple question – are vacancies in town going down or up? What was really behind the Lane Bryant fiasco? Why did the NLC/VCA board majority vote against filling vacant space in the Marshall Fields building downtown – which continues to carry a 75% vacancy rate?

NLC/VCA Spin – This Village board raised the caps on grant and loan amounts available from Oak Park Development Corporation (OPDC) to gateway businesses on Oak Park's borders.

Fact – This is actually correct and we agree this is a good enhancement to a program put in place in partnership between OPDC, the Village and past VMA majority boards. The fact that was conveniently omitted however, was that NLC/VCA Trustees Milstein and Brock voted against all partner agency contracts, which included OPDC, as part of a sweeping NO vote for a large consent agenda during a December 5, 2005 board meeting. Ask yourself again - how can they take credit for something they are on record as voting against?

The perpetuation of half-truths and misleading attacks against a wide range of Oak Parkers who worked hard to serve the public, actually does nothing to solve today's problems.

As was exemplified by the NLC/VCA campaign of 2005, just because someone repeats something often enough and loud enough for everyone to hear, that doesn't mean it's a fact. We urge you to review the village board minutes @ www.oak-park.us and to watch TV-6 to see for yourself what the facts truly are.

And, while the NLC/VCA 'One View' includes an awful lot of sound-bites, we still await sound policies which address the real issues at stake in the community - issues like recent property tax bills which threaten the ability for many to remain in Oak Park and the consistent, high-volume, personal attacks against developers, investors, and some in the business community from NLC/VCA board members.

We are proud of the record of the VMA over the years. We also appreciate a healthy debate of issues that are important to Oak Parkers. Our common bond as Villagers is that we care about the Village and misstating facts threatens that bond. As President John Adams said, "Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence."

Sincerely,
Bob Kane
VMA President on Behalf Of the VMA Board of Directors