

Village Manager Association of Oak Park

Lane Bryant Decision is Consistent

Editorial

It is with great amazement and a little bewilderment that we have watched the current Village Citizens Alliance (VCA) / New Leadership Coalition (NLC) led Board attempt to wiggle out of its latest public saga. If only the Lane Bryant Clothing Store debacle was the first time the Board majority had taken a poorly considered position or made a bad decision, but it is not.

In particular we would like to know what Dress Barn or which Lane Bryant Store anywhere in the U.S.A. does not have a competing store within 200 feet of their front door? In general and perhaps more to the point, we would like to know why the Board majority appears to be so generally hostile to the business community? The simple truth seems to be that this group has an agenda and ran on a platform that is anti-business and anti-development.

We sadly remember how the de-facto leader of this Board argued with Seymour Taxman and how Taxman walked away from Oak Park with 27 million dollars in his bank account that could have been invested here. We also sadly remember how the Board guaranteed a low tax assessment for the former Fields building by denying usage by a private tax paying school. We wonder why the Board majority felt obligated to lecture the downtown retailers while denying their pleas to fast track additional parking. We also wonder why this Board thought that a moratorium on development would be a good idea. It is however, no wonder that developers now are not going through the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process, opting to build within right because the Board has made it cumbersome as well as confrontational and the public thrashing seems to be a scare tactic for developers who would want to step up to the plate.

For us, however, we only have to look at the Wednesday, July 5 Board meeting for everything to be crystal clear. The Board was reviewing construction changes to ok'd projects. One particular project is on North Avenue where MB Financial Bank had brought to the Board changes to the shape of their latest branch to conform to a newly adapted nationwide design standard. The Board rightly informed them that they needed to review the changes with the neighbors -- but it seems the Board was also going to teach them a lesson. They wanted MB to wait in line or start the approval process over. It will take three months for them to be heard and a new review started. Our Village Board, in its wisdom, is going to teach the 9th largest banking group in the U.S. a lesson. In the meantime, North Avenue will have a crater which will cause a public safety issue and exist as an eye-sore for the next seven months because this Board thinks its job is to teach lessons.

The only lesson which will be understood is that Oak Park is a very unfriendly place to make a living, and that this current controlled Board has never had Oak Park as its first priority. Balanced and sensitive development is possible, but you have to want to see it happen first.