



rRemarks Data for June 13, 2023 Village Council Meeting

Agenda Section: Active Agenda

Agenda Item: An ordinance amending section of 3.33(1) of the Downers Grove Municipal Code concerning video gaming at Fraternal and Veteran organizations

Commenter: Anthony Schroeder

Comment: I think this is a little more than housecleaning as previously mentioned. This essentially allows gaming in Downers Grove with little or oversight at a village level. I would like to see some of the suggested adjustments to the code back in October be re-considered. Including, requiring village licenses to be purchased. Additionally, enforcing the location limitations on where gaming machines can be located. Or at a bare minimum, clearly giving the liquor commission an oversight role for these fraternal organizations as regarding gambling. If the fraternal organization violates state gambling laws, I don't see where the village is able to impose fines or oversight. Now personally, I'm not for gaming in the village but if we are going to allow it in this limited capacity, at least give our local officials the ability to manage it and not leave it to the whims of the state laws.

Agenda Section: Comments of a General Nature

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Commenter: David Rose

Comment: Will Wonders Never Cease?

My congratulations to whomever it was managed to persuade the CC that his conduct in the meeting room was hardly consistent with (a purported) respect for the citizens of DG.

I refer of course to the fact that CC finally sat up straight in his chair and spoke directly into the microphone in front of him. This, rather than the pattern during his entire tenure on VC up till 06 Jun of leaning back in his chair (as if he were lounging at home watching his favorite tv show or movie), far enough from the mike that his inability to

project his voice made his comments barely audible to those (few) residents who (bother to) listen to VC proceedings in the meeting room.

[Clearly, the low information voter kept voting for him regardless, but why would they not, since they didn't actually know of his obstinance because they never actually watch committee room proceedings?]

Let's hope CC's decorum at the 06 Jun meeting is not a one off.

Let's further hope others on VC show a similar degree of respect for residents.

Tip to VC members: Watch the two most recent sessions in the committee room to decide if your decorum and voice make it easy for residents to hear and thereby respect what you are saying.

Or simply do what CC did on 06 Jun: sit up straight in your chair and speak into your microphone.

Or sit however you want, but hold the mike in front of you when you speak.

In other words, pretend those beyond VC do actually care to hear what you say.

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Commenter: David Rose

Comment: The Spectacle of Pols Discussing Budgets

After witnessing the travesty of District 58 meetings regarding Longfellow and the district's associated bond proposal discussions, I find it hard to watch meetings of taxing bodies in which people who know little to nothing about finance and economics discuss governmental budgets and finance.

VC's 06 Jun gathering in the committee room was such an instance.

For one, we learned that new member Dav seems (alarmingly?) ignorant of the pension crisis (both public and private) facing the US.

[Did any person selected to VC in the last election win because of their stance on dealing with pension funding? The question is of course rhetorical.]

For another, we saw that with VC's new office facility now under construction, VC is finally willing to direct its attention to dealing with the police and fire pension funding issue.

It's the latest — last? — in the long list of budget items that have been inadequately funded ... because prior VCs did not tax adequately to pay their obligations.

In spite of balanced budget requirements (mandatory or voluntary), it's generally recognized US politicians at every level of government do a poor job managing budgets.

The defect is built into the American political system, and its current manifestation as two 'major' parties competing with each other for dominance.

Their approach to battle is known as the two Santa Claus theory. That is, each party tries to play Santa Claus to its constituents in order to gain/remain in power by getting their voters to support them in the next election ... out of gratitude for the party's past generosity and/or promises of future generosity. The Republicans' Santa gives tax breaks to the rich and limits money spent on the poor. The Democrats' Santa does the opposite.

Furthermore, their attitude in political debate is that one's assertions are to be believed and taken at face value while the other side's claims are to be doubted and require proof. When the bulk of the population is a low information voter and math challenged, the 'debate' between the parties over policy tends to be more theatrical than informative. As I keep repeating, look no further than the debate over the evidence-based formula for K12 education funding in IL for an example. That debate, and the resulting legislation, shows the objective is not to solve problems but to APPEAR to solve problems.

US culture emphasizes promoting individual — as opposed to communal — material well-being and advancement; Because it sees improving material well-being as the primary, indeed sole, means by which to overcome racial and ethnic suspicions and animosity amongst its citizens, economic growth is crucial to maintaining the peace. When growth falters, so does social stability. In other words, national unity in the US arises more from economic possibility — “the American Dream” — than from cultural unity.

Unfortunately, American capitalism is a schizophrenic economic system: the 'natural' inclination of capitalists to pursue growth leads to increased inequality unless it is restrained, both in the way capitalist enterprises operate and in the way the resulting social product is distributed. In recent decades, thanks to a concerted effort by the political right to thwart additional 'progress' grounded in the tenets of FDR's New Deal, little to no effort has been made to restrain rising inequality.

I have called to VC's attention that we live in a period of time in which the rupture between the financial part and real part of the economy, a direct cause and effect of the rising inequality, will undermine the ability of either political party to play Santa in the way it has done in the recent past.

The significance of this eventuality as it pertains to DG is that VC's ability to handle its financial obligations "smoothly" will be much more difficult than it currently imagines.

Only in recent decades have some governmental entities tried to budget for a period of time extending beyond the next election. Places like DG also addressed their prior failure to tax adequately by resorting to the 'safest' political alternative pols have, pursuing more and richer taxpayers to live within their taxing districts. That mechanism avoids having to increase property taxes on existing residents in order to overcome past failures to plan and budget appropriately. Raising property taxes is the single most important no-no for any aspiring pol, especially in a town like DG.

That VC is turning its attention to pension funding at this juncture reflects not so much improved planning on VC's part but the culmination of a sequence of decisions made according to the perceived sense of urgency of a specific project, given the array of underfunded projects that existed in the 1990s. "Kicking the can (of the less urgent project) down the road," as it's called.

In effect, VC is able to face the long-festering issue of pension funding because all the projects deemed more urgent have been addressed. In so doing, VC hopes DG residents will be able to handle pension funding obligations, whatever they may be. But that attitude can NOT be described as the result of good planning, because VC made every one of its recent project budgeting decisions oblivious to pension funding other than the level required by state law. As will be discussed more fully below, the timeframe obligations of existing law appear driven not so much by economic analysis as political embarrassment. The deadline to reach 100% funding seems arbitrary, another instance among many of pols appearing to solve a problem.

For municipal maintenance projects, capital needs are largely fixed, meaning government officials have relatively little discretion in making choices that affect cost. In the case of a project like a new village hall facility, however, the project offers quite a bit of discretion. What's the limit/metric in such cases? From what I've seen in DG, both with VC and DG's other taxing bodies, more often than not it's keeping up with, at the least, one's perceived peers.

All of which is to say: VC's claim of concern over pension funding is hardly sincere when VC failed to factor it into its deliberations on other projects, including the new facility. AND when VC failed to articulate its expectations/predictions of residents' financial capacity in future to meet those obligations.

However, as I have noted previously, VC's failure is back-stopped by two expectations:

1) That DG residents are well positioned to exploit their relatively more powerful location within the private economy to ensure that they will be able to pay their bills, while other, property-poor communities, are left struggling ... are left to wither and decay.

2) Following well-established pattern, that policy actions at the state and/or federal level will bail out the rich and leave the poor to pick up the tab, a pattern known as "the privatization of gain and socialization of loss."

Both contributed to VM being able to claim, as he has done repeatedly since the start of the pandemic, that VC did well — "better than expected" — in handling its budgets during the pandemic years.

As I have noted more than once, we saw with the IL law that changed education funding at the state level, property-rich communities will fight any effort to improve funding for the property-poor if doing so restricts the property-rich communities' ability to fund their local public needs — of every sort — as they see fit.

In effect, the nation's taxing system as a whole exposes that taxation of residential real estate at the local level is a disguised form of graduated income tax the rich are more than happy to pay because they control how the graduated amount is spent. As we see with DG, in a property rich town, the notion of common good ends at the town's border.

The divide between rich and poor in large cities like Chicago plays out within the government of those cities. The divide between rich and poor outside large cities plays out at the county, state, and federal level, including between the county containing a large city and its surrounding counties.

I know Comm Dav is well-aware of this funding imbalance and inadequacy issue from his time on the district 99 board.

What I don't see is any effort on the part of any taxing body's members in property rich towns to do anything other than defend the existing taxing arrangement.

So I will ask again: How much more inequality can the system handle before it ruptures? If we not prepared to stop it from rupturing, what are we intending to do after it ruptures?

Regarding VC's discussion of the pension obligations themselves, I find two omissions particularly worrisome.

1) VM offered no explanation of how the nice smooth upward slope of future obligations depicted in the graph was actually calculated. That is, what assumptions and scenarios underly that slope? If those assumptions and scenarios prove wrong, then what?

Mention was made on 06 Jun that if meeting the goal proves too hard, state government can be expected to move the goalposts ... putting off the deadline for reaching 100% pension funding. Where is the evidence to assure such can-kicking is a workable 'solution?'

Furthermore, where is the evidence that budgetary decisions being made today are cognizant of long-term pension ramifications? Isn't THAT the disregard/disconnect that got us into trouble in the first place?

Should the need arise, will VM lead by example and take a pay cut to reduce the pension obligations of his salary? Or will the public sector match private sector behavior and direct pay cuts and layoffs toward the easily replaceable underlings?

Where is the math showing the two-tiered salary and pension benefits scheme will in fact 'work' over the long run? Are future new hires to be squeezed harder in order to maintain benefit payments to the long-ago retired?

2) VM offered no information about projections regarding budget expectations as a whole, including revenue expectations.

For example, what percentage of the current budget goes toward pensions? If that percentage is to remain the same and the amount of money in 2040 for pensions is X dollars, then the total budget will be how much? Given that total budget amount, what

will it mean in terms of property tax collection? Given that property tax desired/required, what does that amount mean relative to the rate of taxation and/or the total valuation of properties if the rate of taxation is NOT to rise?

Talking in general terms, as VC did on 06 Jun, is hardly evidence of planning. The discussion focused on addressing the rising obligations by striving for better returns on investment. While that is obviously desirable, if one truly wants to plan better, the discussion needs to encompass more than that hope.

In short, where are the scenarios?

I recognize most Americans are math and finance challenged. And I recognize it goes against every instinct of a pol who wants to get elected or re-elected to be specific and/or think beyond the next election, particularly when it comes to budgets.

Discussion on 06 Jun mentioned an amorphous concern that meeting pension fund obligations in coming years may necessitate that other budget items get less or even nothing at all.

Unfortunately, the pattern in DG is for VC and VM to offer little in the way of specifics of how it has been managing its budgets in recent years to identify specifically what has ALREADY been cut or is being done differently (less well?) to save money.

Since VC already believes it is running a tight ship, are residents supposed to simply hope for the best when TSHTF? Prudent planning should include specific ideas VM will propose should the need to tighten further arise, should it not? That such possibilities are typically not articulated suggests VM and VC believe doing so carries little political benefit but a large political harm. Because It exposes Santa's pack is not the cornucopia one hopes.

If past pattern continues, however, I don't expect VC to do anything other than follow the examples of others. VC and VM believe that approach has worked for DG in the past, and will continue to do so in future.

What else would you expect from people who know little to nothing about finance and economics, live in a property-rich town, and/or are committed to the Republican version of Santa Claus?

I suppose I expect too much.

When pols are forced to play catch-up for past failure to plan and tax, pols prefer to meet the need for more revenue by pursuing more growth.

But, as I keep asking, what are we to do now, living as we do in a time when the prospect of ever-more growth is in serious doubt?

What will it take for pols to acknowledge environmental sustainability (ENVS) is a rate of resource consumption issue that at the least necessitates re-assessing one's capacity to rely on growth to solve funding needs?

Why do pols everywhere at every level, including here in DG, refuse to recognize this? Why do they refuse to examine the implications of the fact our way of living in rich nations like the US is NOT ENVS? Why? Because were they to do so, they would have to admit that every budgeting decision made without factoring ENVS into the decision is, over the long run, wrong.

For stated quite bluntly, what is not environmentally sustainable is NOT financially sustainable. What other interpretation should one make when insurance companies are starting to refuse to take on new policy holders in states getting hammered by climate-aggravated weather impacts (think Florida and California, for obvious starters)?

Sadly, nobody in positions of authority is doing an adequate job exploring how to change our way of living to be environmentally sustainable. Nobody.

Thus, since VCs' predisposition is to follow the lead of others, it's hardly surprising VC doesn't take the goal of ENVS seriously, and sticks instead to the popular but bastardized definition.

Which means, as former Citigroup CEO Chuck Prince said just prior to the onset of the Great Recession, we'll all keep dancing until the music stops.

As entertainment, VC budget discussions pale in comparison to the park district's summer concerts.

If only the former had the passingly brief impact of the latter.

Agenda Section: Comments of a General Nature

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Commenter: David Rose

Comment: It depends on one's perspective

One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.

The person likely to be viewed as history's most unique instance of that maxim died Saturday (10 Jun).

I refer of course to native Chicagoan Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber.

Like most people, I had only minimal awareness and knowledge of his life ... until his death. So I took the occasion to read pieces like his NYTimes obituary and the page about him on wikipedia to find out more.

My reaction: K lived the life he had to live in order to survive the society in which he found himself.

K clearly thought of himself as a freedom fighter. As both the NYT and wiki discussions indicate, K explicitly identified himself as a member of the "Freedom Club."

A sympathetic interpretation of his life story is that he had indeed freed himself to be himself. And then set about trying to alert others to the dangers of modern society. Via essentially the only avenue open to him.

Taking the NYT piece as emblematic, contemporary American society considered K a terrorist and psychopath because of how he responded to its treatment of him.

Too smart for his own good, some might say.

His brilliance set K apart. Literally. From early on.

He was admitted to Harvard at age 16, as a math prodigy. For some (inexplicable) reason (by today's methods), Harvard put him in a housing unit populated by rich jocks. They were WASPs, he was working class Polish American nerd.

After grad school, he taught briefly at Cal Berkeley. Not surprisingly his students did not like him. In the field of mathematics however eccentricity and insufficient popularity are

not a deal breaker if you can publish. Which K apparently could. Nevertheless, he chose to resign his position.

He chose instead to live as a recluse, without electricity or running water, on property he and his brother owned in Montana.

In so doing, he seems to have accomplished two things:

1) he learned skills and knowledge of self-sufficiency thought relevant these days only to indigenous peoples and survivalists.

2) Given his intellectual brilliance, he shifted from working in an esoteric area of mathematics to being a self-taught sociologist/anthropologist, trying to understand society in order to figure out how to change it.

His contact with that society (via his local library) was mainly through the books and reading material he needed to stimulate his mind. He used his self-enforced isolation to make his contribution — to try to warn people of the danger he saw modern society presented.

Not surprisingly, that message — and his life — were (and continue to be) interpreted by that society as self-evidently crazy, ridiculous, preposterous. So that society treated it, and him, accordingly.

K was arrested, tried and convicted, and imprisoned for having terrorized that society for years.

He was captured by the only route possible: his brother David and David's wife recognized the Unabomber's manifesto against modern society was likely written by Ted ... because it contained phrases and ideas Ted had used in letters he wrote David.

David knew where Ted lived ... and told the FBI.

K's manifesto was published by the NYT and WaPo in exchange for his commitment to stop hurting people (though not property) with his bombs.

[Sidenote: 'Manifesto' is a word Americans have a visceral negative reaction to, thanks largely to capitalists' and their minions' reflexive rejection of Marx's communist manifesto. The reaction eliminates the need to examine further the content underlying the term. 'Woke' is a word conservatives throw around in similar fashion these days.]

Why had K taken to bombing? As revenge.

Revenge for contemporary America taking away — ‘developing’ — a key place of land in K’s reclusive existence, a place where he likely found a bit of peace and joy. As the Joni Mitchell song says: “they paved paradise and put up a parking lot.” In K’s case, it was a road. It was a manifestation of the very dangers which he was trying to avoid as a recluse and of which he feared for humanity in the long run.

Giving priority to ‘development’ is typical in the US, as DG did in allowing the Longfellow ‘development.’ Always justified by pols as undertaken for the greater good. What is the proof of the contribution to the greater good? The pols’ claim that it is so.

As the NYT obit suggests, inadvertently ironically, the most sociable part of K’s life turned out to be his time in prison. Not only because he socialized with infamous fellow prisoners but more importantly because he corresponded with many people on the outside, people who were sympathetic to/interested in him and his message.

I have not read his manifesto and am not particularly familiar with its ideas and logic — you can get a taste of his thinking on the wiki website here —

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-tech_Revolution

I am sympathetic to his plight however. Why?

Because by my assessment given what I do know of him and his message, K was asking the core questions I have posed in comments to VC about its purported goal of ENVS:

Questions VC, and the larger society, continue to ignore.

Environmental sustainability (ENVS) properly understood is a rate of resource consumption issue. It is NOT the silly bastardized framing the VM, VC, and nearly everyone else uses — in which ‘sustainable’ means ‘friendly,’ as in less willfully harmful to the environment.

To repeat then: a proper understanding of ENVS begs key questions:

Is capitalism compatible with ENVS?

Is democracy?

Is relentless pursuit of economic growth?

If you can't rely on growth to solve social problems — including the objective of providing everyone with means to live sufficiently well in terms of material goods — because growth is incompatible with ENVS, what is to be done?

What does 'development' mean when one confronts the realities of ENVS, that is, the need to use resources sustainably?

Since I haven't read K's stuff, I don't know to what extent he examined and analyzed technology, industrialization, capitalism, ecology, and the like, and thus to what extent I would agree or disagree with his analysis and recommendations.

The wiki page about AntiTech suggests, however, he wrestled with issues implicit in the questions above.

How can one be sympathetic to a person who killed and injured and caused the damage and terror he did?

As suggested by the title of the comment, it depends. One's evaluation depends on one's perspective and one's assessment of the objective — who's doing what to whom and why.

For one example, by coincidence, the news reported last week Tesla's Autopilot driving software has led to the deaths of 17 people thus far. Are the company's leaders and/or software development team about to be arrested and tried for those deaths? The number killed by Tesla driverless cars of course pales in comparison to the annual thousands of highway fatalities Americana tolerate as normal.

What about the drug companies and the harm their products cause? RFKjr is campaigning to be the Dem Party presidential nominee in 2024 in part on grounds not as the anti-vaxxer the media portrays him to be but as someone who is anti-UNSAFE vax. He argues passionately and persuasively our government, the "scientific community," and the medical profession, in addition to the drug companies, have failed miserably on that score.

The covid pandemic brought that issue to everyone's attention. Millions died or were injured. The question is: Did the jabs help or hurt? The official claim is they helped. But critics argue proof of such claims are faulty, deceptive, or missing, often intentionally so.

Furthermore, critics also argue we are not out of the woods yet vis-a-vis covid. Why not? Because widespread jabbing in the midst of the pandemic has made things worse ... because it has prevented not produced herd immunity! The risk is more deaths will occur as the virus evolves and that, in the absence of genuine scientific debate and associated governmental preparation, we will be just as unprepared as we felt in 2020!

Indeed, some of the jab skeptics/critics see covid as part of a plan by certain elites (for nationalist conservatives in the US, it's the rich globalist Davos crowd) to kill off vast numbers of people in order to lower world population to a total that is ENVS! Psychopaths on steroids!!! (No pun intended.)

Then too, in the US we have a deadly combination of social anomie and inequality mixed with current legal interpretations of the Second Amendment. That combination yields greater death and injury on a WEEKLY basis than K did during the entirety of his bombing years!! Mass shootings have become such a regular occurrence, it's become difficult to keep track. The first anniversary of the tragedy in Uvalde TX for example fell so near Memorial Day that, at least for me, including them and all such victims as part of the war dead felt quite appropriate. For are we not at war with each other? What other explanation for all the guns and gun deaths makes more sense? Mental illness? If so, what's causing its proliferation? Where are the peacemakers in our civil war? Not in the property rich towns, from what I see.

Speaking of honoring the nation's war dead, while Dems ridicule Trump for always playing the victim when one is the perpetrator, examination of recent history suggests that tack is classically American, as Memorial Day signifies.

I refer in that regard to the impact of US military action around the world since WWII. According to David Smith's book, "Endless Holocausts — Mass Deaths in the History of the United States Empire," the total killed numbers in the tens of millions. An unknown but clearly significant portion of whom were NOT military personnel. Have we forgotten Madeline Albright's comment about the deaths of Iraqi children resulting from US sanctions on Iraq following Gulf War 1, for example?

Yet how many American leaders — Presidents, Secretaries of State, etc. — have been prosecuted for war crimes? The answer is so obvious the question is absurd. Q: Why is the US not party to the International Criminal Court? A: Because the ICC may not realize that when the US military does whatever it does, it's okay ... because we Americans are pure of heart.

And that's to say nothing about the dubious effects of US economic policies on the world's poor countries during the period.

To cite one related example in that vein, I have been arguing in prior comments to VC that the tragic conflict in Ukraine should be seen as simply the latest incarnation of the US commitment to maintaining our unsustainable way of living, regardless of its impact on/cost to others. Our leaders and media of course work hard to give American citizens a different, more benign — indeed, noble — interpretation of such endeavors.

Thus, to state what should be obvious, perspective matters when one is trying to determine what constitutes mis- and dis-information.

I find particularly telling that the NYT obit omits a part of K's life story the wiki bio includes. Namely this:

In his second year at Harvard, Kaczynski participated in a study described by author Alston Chase as a "purposely brutalizing psychological experiment" led by Harvard psychologist Henry Murray. Subjects were told they would debate personal philosophy with a fellow student and were asked to write essays detailing their personal beliefs and aspirations. The essays were given to an anonymous individual who would confront and belittle the subject in what Murray himself called "vehement, sweeping, and personally abusive" attacks, using the content of the essays as ammunition.[20] Electrodes monitored the subject's physiological reactions. These encounters were filmed, and subjects' expressions of anger and rage were later played back to them repeatedly.[20] The experiment lasted three years, with someone verbally abusing and humiliating Kaczynski each week.[21][22] Kaczynski spent 200 hours as part of the study.[23]

Kaczynski's lawyers later attributed his hostility towards mind control techniques to his participation in Murray's study.[20] During the Second World War, Murray worked with the Office of Strategic Services, a U.S. intelligence agency often referred to as the predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), where he conducted psychological experiments.[24] Some sources have suggested that Murray's experiments were part of Project MKUltra, the CIA's program of research into mind control.[25][26] Chase and others have also suggested that this experience may have motivated Kaczynski's criminal activities.[27][28] Kaczynski stated he resented Murray and his co-workers, primarily because of the invasion of his privacy he perceived as a result of their experiments. Nevertheless, he said he was "quite confident that [his]

experiences with Professor Murray had no significant effect on the course of [his] life." [29]

Should we take K at his word — that the experience did not have a significant effect on him? As he was generally, was K the exception to the rule in this case as well? Or did the experience sit latent, waiting to explode?

As this discussion of the experiment implies:

www.counterpunch.org/2023/06/12/the-unabomber-the-cia-and-ld/

Who's more dangerous, K or the CIA? As US history suggests, one's answer depends not only on whom you ask, but when?

Had K been homosexual and more sociable, his fate may have been more like that of Alan Turing. [If you don't know that name, look it up.]

How long did Britain take to acknowledge how shabbily it had treated an individual who played such a key and unique role in saving its very existence?

Will K be similarly recognized in the US some day?

Will the day come before or after the nation succumbs to the self-afflicted/inflicted demise K foresaw if we do not change course?

K is reported to have killed himself. Apparently he had seen enough.

I for one wonder if he was encouraged or discouraged at where things stand in the (if only we were more humble and) United States of America.
