Community and Economic Development Committee Meeting - September 22, 2010

**Prepared Remarks**

I want to devote my time tonight to three subject areas beginning with rebutting and correcting statements made by Alderman Wynne and Alderman Fiske in recent city meetings and comments made by member Jeanne Lindwall at the last Mayor’s Budget Committee meeting. I did not have prior opportunity to correct the record.

Alderman Wynne made statements at the last EDC meeting that she had compelling documents in her personal possession that contradicted my study regarding the performing arts venues, the marina, and the lakefront. I submitted a FOIA request for each study Alderman Wynne claimed to have. The response I received is that Alderman Wynne has no such files in her possession and my request was referred to the Recreations Department. I received a copy of the Marina Study, and a copy of the Lakefront Master Plan Technical Appendix both of which I will refer to tonight. The Recreations Department has no files regarding a performing arts venue study. The minutes should reflect that Alderman Wynne’s statements were incorrect.

Alderman Wynne stated at the last EDC meeting that the marina study proposed years ago would come at a cost of $250 million dollars to tax payers. The report I received from Recreations states the cost of the Marina was estimated by the Army Corps of Engineers to be $21 to $22 million dollars. The minutes should reflect that Alderman Wynne’s comment was incorrect.

Alderman Wynne and Alderman Fiske stated that marinas are major source of pollution, and debris in the lake. This characterization is not what is stated in the Army Corps of Engineers report. The report states just the opposite. The minutes should reflect that Alderman Wynne and Alderman Fiske mis-characterized the reports’ findings.

Alderman Wynne, Alderman Fiske and Jeanne Lindwall and others opposed to considering changes the lakefront often use the Lakefront Master Plan and Marina Study documents as evidence that the entire City of Evanston overwhelmingly supports no lakefront development. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers again contradicts this assertion in the marina report. The Lakefront Master Plan document has a resounding 24 individuals who submitted
comment forms; this pales in comparison to our 75,000 citizen population. Maybe there should be a formal referendum vote taken regarding uses of the lakefront.

Just days ago at the council meeting Alderman Wynne and Alderman Fiske attempted to prevent any further thought related to the Lakefront holding up the Lakefront Master Plan document as the gospel to follow from now until the end of eternity. Fortunately the majority disagreed.

Alderman Fiske commented that the plan I had shown was too expensive. I ask based upon what financial study was this conclusion drawn from. The study I have embarked upon will lead to a marketing study and a financial feasibility study, but that is down the road a bit.

Alderman Wynne reasoned that there should be no more discussion about the lakefront because my study was “confusing staff” and taking up too much time in committee meetings. I happen to think the Evanston city staff are pretty intelligent people and no one I have spoken to has said anything about being confused. I would be happy to spend time with whomever to clear up any confusion about this plan. Regarding taking too much time in meetings, now I’m confused, in that the prior EDC meeting is the first formal committee meeting I have been able to present to.

Alderman Fiske made issue of my request for staff support as another reason to cut off any further discussion about the lakefront. What the alderman did not say is that I requested a total of four hours of staff time to attend a meeting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers because that agency prefers to have a city official present. What the alderman did not tell you is that I offered to reimburse the city for the staff member’s time and expenses. I made this offer because it is imperative for me to learn the facts, and not to base decisions on hearsay information.

Aldermen Wynne and Fiske have attempted to subvert further study of the lakefront by their statements and by mis-representing the very studies they have come to champion. I am inclined to conclude that the defense of the lakefront has little to nothing to do with the environmental issues, pollution issues, or claims of a city wide consensus that the lakefront should remain a passive use. I have concerns there is something more sinister behind these veils of smoke.
The lakefront uses I am presenting or even something less significant can be built safely and be environmentally friendly. The environmental issues are important to me. I am a lifetime member of the Alliance for the Great Lakes and a member of Environment Illinois, and the US Green Building Council. I take offense that fictitious environmental issues are raised to screen another agenda by those who oppose changes to the lakefront.

Boat owners should not be labeled as a group of polluters when experts, (the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers), know every effort is being made to control pollution in the lake by recreational boat operators. Wilmette has a beautiful marina. I walked the complete edge of the waterfront and found no trash and no oil slicks in the water; I could not find even a single cigarette butt floating in the water. Their marina is perfectly maintained and boaters are doing their job policing the environment. Evanston can do the same.

The defense of the Lakefront appears to be largely by of those who live along or near the lake. Reading through the marina report I find many statements that conflict with the notion that the city at large overwhelmingly opposed the marina and I quote just a few sentences below:

*The highest response totals, in the “oppose” market segment, came from survey respondents with this profile description: Non-boat owners, when compared to boat owners. Live within three blocks of the lake, when compared to those who live three to six blocks from the lake or over six blocks from the lake.”*

“The following development options registered substantial “in favor” pluralities: Expansion of Beaches and more parks and green spaces.”

“From an economic perspective, the proposed project is viewed more favorably with the following attendant advantages recognized by respondents.: Contribution to City Revenues Through Taxes / Fees on Marina; Stimulus to Local business; Creation of Jobs in Evanston.”

Further there is a complete section titled “Evanston Harbor Section 107” sub-titled Environmental concerns preliminary evaluation. What jumps off the page is the statement: “While some non-boaters may be concerned that marinas are a significant source of pollution
on the water bodies they are located on, this is not the case.” This section of the report is 16 pages long.

In the small point department, the Lakefront Master Plan estimates the cost of the design implementation to be nearly $50 million dollars to Evanston tax payers. There was apparently no goal set to recover this cost over time.

It appears that those who live along or near the lake just don’t want it changed. Presumably they see it as their front yard and their property to control. Another unfortunate way of describing the situation is there are those in Evanston who “have” and those who “have not” or “have little” and the effort seems to be to keep the status quo in place. I must reiterate that the lakefront belongs to all nine wards and all of the citizens of Evanston.

Proposal Goals and Revenue Highlights:

My proposal seeks to bring a new source of revenue to Evanston in the form of Evanston as a national destination of choice by visitors. The revenue produced by the proposal will remove the burden of ever increasing taxes and fees on Evanston citizens, especially the property tax payers. The proposal will provide revenue to significantly support the core problems facing Evanston in recent debates including pensions, library funding, more and better schools, and reductions in city staff levels. The most important result of this kind of economic development will be the creation of jobs in Evanston. Hundreds if not thousands of jobs and careers will be created. A glimmer of a future will emerge for those who see no hope.

A convention center capable of events for 3,500 to 4,000 people (a modest size convention center) will guarantee annual tax revenue in the $10’s of millions of dollars. I have no doubt about this.

A marina will produce a million dollars of revenue for every hundred boats. The revised plan suggests 260 boats which would translate into $2.6 million dollars of annual revenue in Evanston. I have no doubt this can be accomplished, and be accomplished with environmental prudence.

I am also fairly convinced based upon my research that properly designed “world class” music and theatre venues will produce $10’s if not $100’s of millions of dollars of
increased revenue activity throughout Evanston. I know others are not convinced and I also would like more evidence before drawing this conclusion. The best reference I found for established performing arts I found was in the City of Boston and specifically the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Boston is dedicated to the success of the performing arts and revenue projections I have seen suggest over $160 million dollars of revenue is associated with the BSO itself. I intend to visit Boston, meet with city officials, with BSO representatives and with Leo Beranek who has researched 100’s of performing arts facilities over his 94 year lifetime and career. He is a notable expert in the field. In a letter to Mayor Tisdahl I offered to fund a small fact finding group from Evanston to travel with me and hear what I hear about these facilities. It is important to make certain that what is published is accurate.

The Revised Plan:

I have revised the plan you saw at the last EDC listening to many of your comments. The reduced plan is not as ambitious but retains the core elements of a convention center, resort hotel, “12” star restaurant, world class music and theatre venues, and support facilities. The reduced footprint provides little room for growth, if any. The revenue producing venues remain in place.

I believe the lakefront is a critical element in any plan designed to bring new visitors to Evanston. As the study goes forward, it may be prudent to look for other sites on land or along the lake that still provide for lakefront views and keep downtown as an adjacency.

Attachments:

Photos of the Wilmette Marina
Marina Study Excerpt “Evanston harbor Section 107”
Alderman Wynne’s response to my FOIA’s
Recreations response to the FOIA regarding the Lakefront Master Plan revenue projections
Leo Beranek recent lecture at Sydney University
X. Continuation Of Discussion Of Fine Arts And Performing Arts District
Mike Vasilko of Visilko Architects began his presentation by passing out a handout to the committee. Chair Wynne requested the presentation be limited to three minutes since the committee had a full presentation at the previous meeting. M. Vasilko gave a brief presentation and encouraging the committee to read the handout.

Ald. Rainey felt the project is fascinating and because it is so controversial suggested that the Mayor appoint a subcommittee for those aldermen and committee members interested in exploring the possibilities of a fine arts and performing arts district.


XI. Communications
b. Staff Status Report

XII. Adjournment
The meeting was adjourned at 9:55 pm.

NEXT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING: October 27, 2010

Respectfully Submitted,

Annette Logan

Annette Logan
Economic Development Planner
CITY OF EVANSTON  
REQUEST FOR RECORDS UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT (FOIA)  

NAME: Michael Vasylko

COMPANY NAME: N.A.

ADDRESS: 2728 Reese Ave.

CITY: Evanston  STATE: IL  ZIP: 60201

TELEPHONE: HOME: 847.570.0619  OFFICE: 312.755.9800  CELL: N.A.

EMAIL ADDRESS: mvasylko@vasylko-architects.com  FAX: 312.670.3689

Please describe below the public records you are requesting. To expedite the search for records, please be specific. (Copies of blueprints are prohibited without written consent of the project architect.)

During the EDC meeting on 7-28-2010, Alderman Wynne stated she has files concerning the Evanston Lakefront Master Plan.

I am requesting copies of all documents in Alderman Wynne's possession related to the Evanston Lakefront Master Plan.

Please indicate if you wish to review material or require copies.  
Copy  Review

Photocopies are 15¢ per page after first 50 pages. Certification is $1 per document.

Is this request for a commercial purpose?  ☐ Yes  ☐ No (If yes, the City of Evanston will respond to this request within twenty-one (21) business days).  
For research purposes related to the proposed Evanston Fine Arts and Performing Arts District Study.  
The City of Evanston will respond to this request within five (5) or (21) business days. (If request requires an extension, five additional business days will be requested and will be sent to you in writing.)

(Signature of person making the request.)

Mail or Fax to: City Clerk, 2100 Ridge Ave., Evanston, IL 60201  FAX: 847-448-8131
Email: Rodney Greene/City Clerk (rgreene@cityofevanston.org); & Elaine Autwell/Deputy Clerk (eautwell@cityofevanston.org)

(RESPONSE TO THIS REQUEST MUST BE MADE BY:  (Date))

Response from the following is requested:

☐ CC
☐ CD
☐ HR
☐ Legal
☐ P/F&R
☐ Police
☐ PW
☐ CMO
☐ Finance

March 19, 2010
Date August 4, 2010

Name Michael Vasilko
Street Address 2728 Reese Ave.
City/State/Zip Evanston, IL 60201

Dear Mr. or Ms. Vasilko:

Please be advised that additional time is needed in order to process your request for public records received by the City Clerk on:

Date July 29, 2010

This need for additional time is due to the following reason(s).

☐ (i) The requested records are stored in another location;
☐ (ii) The request requires the collection of a large number of records;
☐ (iii) The request is categorical in nature and requires an extensive search;
☐ (iv) The public body has failed to locate the requested records in its initial attempt and the search is continuing;
☐ (v) The requested records require examination by a competent person in order to determine which, if any, are exempt under Section 7 of the Act;
☐ (vi) It would unduly burden or interfere with the operations of the public body to fill the request within the initial seven (7) working days;
☐ (vii) There is a need for consultation with another public body which has a substantial interest in the determination or in the subject matter of the request.

Your request for public records will be acted upon on or before:

Date August 12, 2010

Sincerely yours,

Name Rodney Greene
Department City Clerk / FOIA officer
CITY OF EVANSTON
REQUEST FOR RECORDS UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT (FOIA)

NAME: MICHAEL VASILKO

COMPANY NAME: N.A.

ADDRESS: 2728 REESE AVE.

CITY: EVANSTON STATE: IL ZIP: 60201

TELEPHONE: HOME: 847.570.0619 OFFICE: 312.755.9800 CELL: N.A.

EMAIL ADDRESS: MVASILKO@VASILKO-ARCHITECTS.COM FAX: 312.670.3689

Please describe below the public records you are requesting. To expedite the search for records, please be specific. (Copies of blueprints are prohibited without written consent of the project architect.)

DURING THE EDC MEETING ON 7.28.2010, ALDERMAN WYNNE STATED SHE HAS FILES CONCERNING A PREVIOUS EVANSTON PERFORMING ARTS BUILDING STUDY.

I AM REQUESTING COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS IN ALDERMAN WYNNE'S POSSESSION RELATED TO PREVIOUS EVANSTON PERFORMING ARTS BUILDING STUDY.

Please indicate if you wish to review material or require copies. Copy Review

Photocopies are 15¢ per page after first 50 pages. Certification is $1 per document.

Is this request for a commercial purpose? Yes ☐ No ☐ (If yes, the City of Evanston will respond to this request within twenty-one (21) business days). For research purposes related to the proposed Evanston Fine Arts and Performing Arts District Study. The City of Evanston will respond to this request within five (5) or (21) business days. (If request requires an extension, five additional business days will be requested and will be sent to you in writing.)

(Signature of person making the request.)

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Email: Rodney Greene/City Clerk (greene@cityofevanston.org); & Elaine Autwell/Deputy Clerk (autwell@cityofevanston.org)

(For office use only)

Response to this request must be made by: (Date)

Response from the following is requested:

☐ Fire
☐ H/S/H
☐ HR
☐ Legal
☐ P/F&R
☐ Police
☐ PW
☐ Finance

March 19, 2010
August 4, 2010

Michael Vasilko

2728 Reese Ave.
Evanston, IL 60201

Dear Mr. or Ms. Vasilko:

Please be advised that additional time is needed in order to process your request for public records received by the City Clerk on:

July 29, 2010

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- [X] (i) The requested records are stored in another location;
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- [ ] (iii) The request is categorical in nature and requires an extensive search;
- [ ] (iv) The public body has failed to locate the requested records in its initial attempt and the search is continuing;
- [ ] (v) The requested records require examination by a competent person in order to determine which, if any, are exempt under Section 7 of the Act;
- [ ] (vi) It would unduly burden or interfere with the operations of the public body to fill the request within the initial seven (7) working days;
- [ ] (vii) There is a need for consultation with another public body which has a substantial interest in the determination or in the subject matter of the request.

Your request for public records will be acted upon on or before:

August 12, 2010

Sincerely yours,

Name  Rodney Greene
Department  City Clerk / FOIA officer
Date     August 12, 2010

Mr. Mike Vasilko
mvasilko@vasilko-architects.com

Name

Street     2728 Reese Avenue
Address

City/State/Zip     Evanston, IL 60201

Dear Mr. Vasilko,

Your request for copies of public records received, and with an agreed upon extension of time to respond to August 12, 2010, is partially denied. With respect to my notes relative to the Lakefront Master Plan, please be advised that after doing a diligent search, I verified that I no longer possess such notes. With respect to any materials regarding the performing arts center, I also verified that I do not possess any responsive materials. Lastly, you asked for copies of materials regarding the marina. I do not possess materials which would be entirely responsive to your request. As such, I believe the City of Evanston Parks and Recreation Department would possess such materials, which may go back as far as 1966. In speaking with our Corporation Counsel, it is my understanding that he will be contacting you via separate cover in order to work with you to ensure you obtain a complete and comprehensive response to your records request relative to that category.

You have a right to have the partial denial of your request reviewed by the Public Access Counselor (PAC) at the Office of the Illinois Attorney General. 5 ILCS 140/9.5(a). You can file your Request for Review with the PAC by writing to: Cara Smith, Public Access Counselor, Office of the Attorney General, 500 South 2nd Street, Springfield, Illinois 62706; Fax: 217-782-1396; E-mail: publicaccess@atg.state.il.us. You also have the right to seek judicial review of your denial by filing a lawsuit in the State circuit court. 5 ILCS 140/11.

If you choose to file a Request for Review with the PAC, you must do so within 60 calendar days of the date of this denial letter. 5 ILCS 140/9.5(a). You must include a copy of your original FOIA request and this denial letter when filing a Request for Review with the PAC.
Sincerely yours,

Melissa Wynne