

Citizens Respond To Wood River Councilmen Letters To Editor

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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WOOD RIVER - Several public commenters at the July 17 Wood River City Council meeting used their five minutes to respond to recent Letters to the Editor on Riverbender.com that were written by Councilmen [Bill Dettmers](#) and [Jeremy Plank](#).

Members of the public also echoed previously voiced sentiments of dissatisfaction with the council and again called for the resignations of Bill Dettmers, David Ayres, and Jeremy Plank.

“I want to start out about the [statement](#) Jeremy Plank made on the Riverbender. You said, ‘There is a handful of disgruntled people who are being led and organized by four failed candidates for city council,’” Pastor Dave Landry said. “I’d like to clarify - it’s not a ‘handful,’ it’s at least 1,000 and it’s rapidly growing.”

Landry added that Councilman Dettmers told him before Dettmers was elected that he would not support a cannabis dispensary in Wood River, and said “wanting citizens to vote is just a stalling technique they’re using to hope that it goes away.” He also criticized Councilmen Dettmers, Ayres, and Plank for not being present at the [recent walk-through tours](#) of the Rec Center being constructed in the city.

“Would you really want 1,000 or more storming City Hall with five minutes to blast your reckless policies?” Landry asked. “You guys are not listening to the citizens - you’re listening to a few, but not to everybody ... according to your post on Riverbender, you’re now wanting to silence our voice at City Council meetings, but this is still a nation of ‘We the People’ and not tyrants.”

Plank wrote in [his Letter to the Editor](#) that he “intends to have a conversation with the Mayor about the direction of public comments so that we can turn the page toward the progress that voters want.”

In [Dettmers’ Letter to the Editor](#), he called previous public comments “nothing more than personal smear attacks intended to tarnish council members including negative comments about their immediate family members.” He added that he finds this behavior

“deeply offensive” and that he’s “extremely disappointed that the Mayor has failed to enforce decorum and gaveled such comments out of order.”

Lauren Friese responded when she took the stand and said the following:

“Embedded in the article is also a comment about how this council member believes certain comments need to be ‘gaveled.’ However, I would urge you to brush up on Constitutional rights and freedom of speech, as there is a hefty fine involved when a person is suppressed from expressing themselves, whether in person or on social media platforms,” Friese said. “There are further guidelines that show that as long as community members are not using derogatory language, they are well within their rights to stand up for how they feel.”

Another point Dettmers addressed in his letter concerned his lawsuit against the city over the use of a 1% sales tax increase to fund the construction of the city’s new Recreation Center, which is nearing completion. In his letter, Dettmers wrote:

“Contrary to the numerous statements of economic disaster for the city to defend itself against my lawsuit, the Mayor and the members of the last City Council were fully aware that it was funded by the city’s liability insurance.”

Landry said he disagreed with Dettmers’ statement that the lawsuit didn’t cost the city financially, because “that’s the kind of stuff that drives insurance costs up.” He also claimed Dettmers had other lawsuits against the city and that, according to reports obtained by Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, he has cost the city “thousands of dollars in attorney’s fees.” He once again called for Councilmen Dettmers, Ayres, and Plank to “resign immediately.”

Later in the meeting, Friese said “it is very obvious and evident that there is one city council member who claims residency although he is never at his home. Why are we allowing this individual to cast important votes for our city? I can tell you that in the last 90 days ... I’ve seen that individual’s car one time. As I’ve stated before, I check on my parents multiple times a day and pass by this home multiple times a day.

“If you’re not living in Wood River, but you’re deciding the future of our town, I urge you to immediately resign from public office.”

Plank then asked Mayor Tom Stalcup if he would use the gavel on comments that “don’t relate to the city.” When asked for clarification, Plank said he was referring to “comments of a personal nature - watching houses and things like that.”

“If it’s out of line, Jeremy,” Mayor Stalcup responded. “They have a right to voice their opinion.”

“We don't want to restrict that - they can certainly voice their opinion on Facebook and the like,” Plank replied. “But if they’re going to talk about watching my house in a City Council public forum, it should be restricted to city business.”

Brian Mallory later took the stand to inform Wood River citizens about a proposal from the mayor and City Council to split off about 10 acres from Belk Park near Rock Hill Road “and donate - not sell, not bid, but donate - the land to a for-profit developer to build a wedding venue within your park.”

That proposal goes before the Planning Commission this Thursday, July 20 at 7 p.m. at Wood River City Hall. Mallory encouraged the public to “be present at this Planning meeting to at least learn of your greedy councilmen and mayor’s backdoor and almost hush-hush deal to privatize a portion of Belk Park.”

A full recording of the July 17 meeting, including even more public comments, can be watched at the top of this story or on Riverbender.com/video.



