

Re: Bill No. 2007-73

Statement of Reasons for Disapproval

Let me start by saying what a good job the Historic City of Jefferson has done in presenting a plan for renovation of the Bassmann House and in encouraging other proposals. As a private, not for profit group, it's very difficult to put together a plan for a very large renovation project involving hundreds of thousands of dollars. And I want to thank Councilman Ron Medin for working with the Historic City of Jefferson and other bidders to present viable plans for this structure. If the council does not override my action today, there are many other sites where this model can be implemented and this energy put to good use.

I could point out some technical problems with the current proposal. For example, I do not know why the city should continue to provide insurance coverage for the site during renovations over which it has no control. And I do not believe the promissory note and the buy-back provisions adequately protect the city from profiteering down the road. But my action today is not based on any specific deficiencies in the proposed contract.

The problem is not the proposal itself or the intentions of those promoting it. The problem runs much deeper than whether it would be nice to see an old building rehabilitated at this location. The problem is accountability to taxpayers for funds expended, consistency of purpose and planning, and maintaining a perspective that is larger than one house on one lot.

Although a present council is not bound by the plans and intentions of councils past, and there are occasions when circumstances require a reasonable person to change course, such changes in direction should be prompted by unanticipated changes in circumstances and should not be taken lightly.

Long-term visions are hard to maintain amid annual budget concerns, passing fads and turnover of elected representatives. There are very few documented long-term goals in our community, and some have said that is one of our basic weaknesses. Whether you're a football team or a business owner or a civic leader, strength comes from consistency of purpose that spans decades, and weakness comes from shifting goals and priorities without good cause.

A few years ago, when I was on the city council, we voted to spend a large sum to acquire a site that we believed to be important for a single purpose. The money we spent could have, at that time, reduced the tax levy by four cents. The money was spent after considerable debate not for preservation and not for rehabilitation. Our purpose and vision was shared by another tax supported city entity, the Housing Authority. Over time, the City Council and the Housing Authority have painstakingly assembled parcels within our urban core for a single purpose – to make land available for a significant community project. Assembling parcels in an urban core is not easy or cheap, and it is often not popular. Developers in suburbs

can buy hundred acre pastures and build malls, strip centers, gated communities and subdivisions. Making large commercially viable parcels available for urban redevelopment is very hard.

Without coordinated acquisitions of this nature Capital Plaza Hotel and the Truman Building would not have been constructed; and those economic engines would have gone elsewhere, perhaps even to another community. Lands were acquired for these projects and amenities because of large range planning, and not to make sites available for very worthwhile, but small, projects. Discreet individual projects can, and should be, implemented throughout the city with great benefits resulting, and I hope HJC continues to look for opportunities such as their renovation on East McCarty near the National Cemetery.

Contrary to some current rhetoric, our community, including city government, has done much to facilitate redevelopment. The Governor Hotel renovation required city parking concessions. Our facade removal program and the complete street and sidewalk renovations have helped revitalize downtown. O'Donoghue's and Prison Brews on the east side were encouraged by tax dollars spent on infrastructure improvements; and millions more will be spent as Lafayette Street is extended past the original historic entrance to the old penitentiary, providing a red carpet to the historic treasures contained at that site. Therefore the question is not whether Jefferson City supports historic and neighborhood preservation. The question is whether this discreet renovation of a non-historic structure should be added to the long list of subsidies and supports given to preservation in Jefferson City.

I have concluded it should not be, for several reasons.

This site was acquired, like the Housing Authority sites adjacent to it, to provide space for a very large amenity which will create energy not only at the site itself, but for the surrounding urban core. Large spaces are hard to acquire and take decades to assemble. I will submit to you that a successful conference center and hotel, with a powerful commercial and office street presence on McCarty, will over time ultimately save dozens of historic structures in the downtown area. It will be a first-class facility that can be designed over the entire landscape, with multiple street views and accesses and images that will attract people who come to our city to do business.

The subject lot is interesting, and there is no doubt it could be renovated, but it pales in comparison with how our downtown will be re-energized with visitors if we can create a robust center for activity one block away. Our community should work toward great ideas and not sell ourselves short. Instead of telling our conference center architects to shoe horn the structure into the back of the block, and restrict access and visibility on the side of a major thoroughfare, let's give the architects a broad pallet to create a truly notable center. McCarty Street will not be the wall of a parking structure as some fear, but it will be a vibrant new streetscape bustling with activity that is integral to the overall plan.

My decision is also affected by the fact that the structure on this site is not historic. It is merely a nice old structure in a prominent location. In fact, its only historical significance is that it contains the stones from a demolition which was also good for our city- when the Price Mansion was leveled to create room for one of the architectural jewels of the city –the Supreme Court Building – a place where history is made every day. That demolition took tremendous vision. But time has shown that those leaders had their priorities straight. Making McCarty Street part of the conference center project takes the same vision.


We are close to spanning the Missouri River with a pedestrian walkway. We are close to finding a way to access the Missouri River and Adrian's Island. In a few days I will go to Kansas City to look at plans for a new federal courthouse that will launch the MSP redevelopment. Next month crews will tear down the red administration building at MSP and with city and county funds we will present to citizens for the first time in a hundred years the historic ornamental entrance to the penitentiary and the historic treasures beyond. In a few weeks entrepreneurs will open the first micro-brewery in our community at the site of the historic Landwehr Dairy on Ash Street, an area being revitalized through capital improvement tax dollars. Through city efforts and tax dollars, the new jail and sheriff's office will help maintain our central business district instead of being relocated to the suburbs.

We should not deviate from the mission and vision of earlier councils to make select areas within our urban core available to large-scale development. The goal is not to replace our history, or eliminate it, but to make truly historic structures economically viable for redevelopment because of the vibrancy of our urban core. The HCJ and other groups have a role in that effort. I hope they will join me. There are several projects I'd like to see them involved in -- projects much more important than this one.

What makes this difficult is not the decision itself because I truly believe it is correct. What makes me pause is the disappointment I may cause in people who are my lifelong friends and for whom I have the greatest respect. Steve Viele, Stu and Mary Ann Murphy and others are great citizens who contribute selflessly to our heritage. I hope if this project does not go forward they will be willing to work with me on others.

This transfer of valuable real estate is in my opinion not in the best long-term interest of our community and does not represent good stewardship of tax dollars expended previously as part of a major long term vision.

I have therefore disapproved Bill No. 2007-73.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John Landwehr".

/Mayor John Landwehr September 17, 2007