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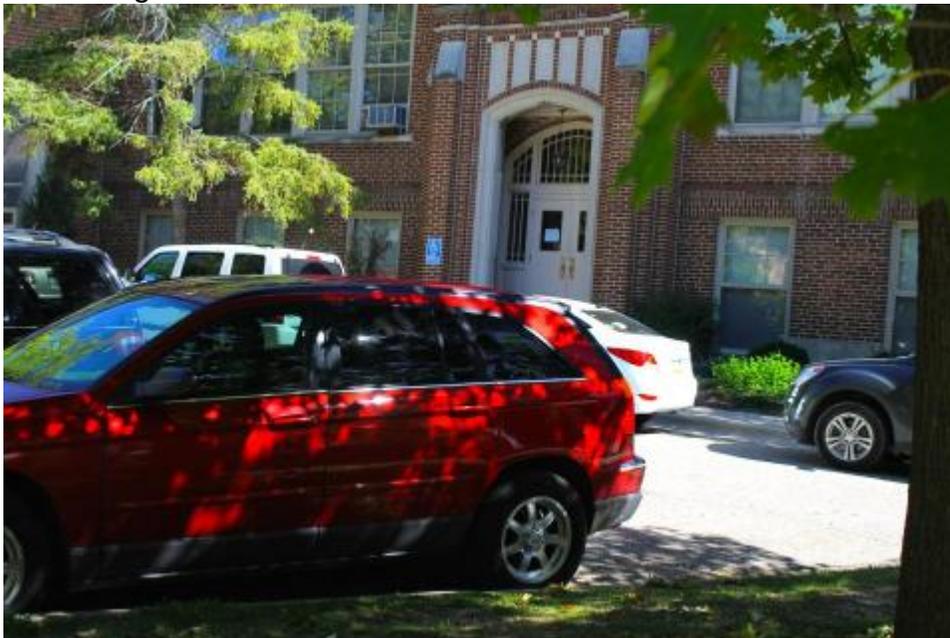
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Triplett, Goddeeris, and Woods Vote to Close Bailey; Building Set to Be Locked Up in June ^[1]

Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 12:30 am

By:

Alice Dreger



In a long and contentious Council meeting tonight, Mayor Nathan Triplett, Mayor Pro Tem Diane Goddeeris, and Council member Susan Woods effectively voted to close the Bailey daycare and also the Bailey Community Center in June of this year.

The three rejected a motion by Councilmember Ruth Beier to ?direct the City manager to keep Bailey Child Care Center running on the first floor of Bailey [Community Center] until June 30, 2016 and to work with the Bailey Parents? working group to transfer the Child Care service from a city function to a tenant-run program as soon as possible, but no later than June 30, 2016.?

The parents? working group had presented a highly detailed plan that they said would result in a sustainable program and that would keep the Bailey Community Center from being shuttered. City staff consistently argued the costs of keeping the community center open are too great for the City to bear beyond June.

During the discussion, Parks and Recreation Director Tim McCaffrey struggled to answer Council's questions about which costs will be incurred even if the building is closed. The building needs repair to prevent weather intrusion and requires a modern fire suppression system, as well as electrical work. McCaffrey admitted this work was overdue according to building codes. At times he said that much of this work would have to happen even if the building closed, although he equivocated on this. Ultimately he said he will check with the building inspector tomorrow about which fixes are required even if the building is not officially in use.

About 25 citizens spoke on the issue at Council, with all but two (Beverley Baten and her son Jeff) unequivocally in favor of Beier's proposal. They said that closing the daycare would hurt parents—especially nursing mothers—as well as children, property values in Bailey, the Bailey neighborhood, and ultimately the City itself.

Erik Altmann read a letter from former mayor Mark Meadows strongly criticizing City management, saying the crisis had been created by a "failure in management." Meadows charged the City with questionable accounting practices in the matter. Meadows' letter was endorsed by former mayor Liz Schweitzer, and with Doug Jester's letter [2] brought to a total of three the number of former mayors supporting the parents' group.

Explaining her vote to close Bailey, Goddeeris said Bailey was not as important to fund as other family-centered projects that also need money, including the Hannah Center, the library, and the Aquatic Center, all of which also regularly lose money. Goddeeris said she was "put in this role to make a tough decision." She assured the public the Bailey neighborhood was not as fragile as some of its members claim and that it would come through this.

Before his vote to close Bailey, Triplett said it was "not in the best interest of the community" to keep the daycare and community center open at this time. "Every dollar spent on A can't be spent on B," he said.

Before she voted to close the center, Woods noted she lives in the neighborhood and "cherishes" it and that "that makes this a very emotional problem for me." She said she was "so impressed, I can't even believe it" with regard to the working group's proposal. Woods encouraged them to find another location for their daycare plan, "maybe even in Bailey."

As it became clear that Triplett, Goddeeris, and Woods were going to vote to close the center, Beier and Triplett broke into a heated argument. Beier noted that City Council members were willing to give the Trowbridge plaza developer a more lucrative TIF deal [3] when he complained his profits were too low, thus reducing funds that would go into the City's general fund—but that they would not use the general fund to save the Bailey daycare and community center now. (The same Council members who voted for the TIF increase for Trowbridge—Triplett, Goddeeris, and Woods—also voted against Bailey tonight.)

Beier said this is exactly the kind of thing the general fund is there for. "That's why it's there. . . . It's to cover costs we can't anticipate." She added sarcastically, holding up the City's financial audit, "It's not there so we can feel better about having a larger orange bar" on a chart.

Triplett, an attorney, insisted that Beier was being factually incorrect, and said that when money

goes to a developer for TIF, it doesn't come out of the general fund. Beier, an economist, said that if you give away your potential tax revenue, you are doing the same as spending the money. "It has exactly the same effect on the fund balance," she said, adding, "That's how addition works. Or subtraction in this case."

Triplett refused to concede the point, telling Beier she was "quibbling" and saying again that money that went to developers through TIF doesn't come out of the City's general fund. (His point was that it never reaches the general fund, so it can't be coming out of the general fund.) He argued that there were too many financial costs and uncertainties associated with Beier's and the parents' proposals.

Councilmember Kathy Boyle joined Beier in voting to support the parents' working group. Boyle said she thought it was a reasonable expenditure and stood to benefit the Bailey neighborhood with stability while discussions continue about what to do with the building. She called the building "an important asset to the community and this neighborhood."

Boyle also put forth a motion to use a community dialogue process called "strategic doing" to figure out what to do next with the building. That proposal passed unanimously, so that will be the process used to discuss the future of the Bailey Community Center.

Boyle said she thought that closing the daycare and building now was likely to harm that community dialogue process.

Triplett insisted the Community Center will not become student housing and the park will not be harmed. He called this his "line in the sand."

See our follow-up report on reactions to the vote. ^[4]

UPDATE, January 21, 4:30 pm: Per an email from Mayor Pro Tem Diane Goddeeris, in the above sentence "Goddeeris said she was 'put in this world to make a tough decision,'" the word "world" was corrected to read "role."

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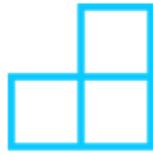
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