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Home > Two Former Mayors Denounce Political Mailer

Two Former Mayors Denounce Political Mailer ^[1]

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By:

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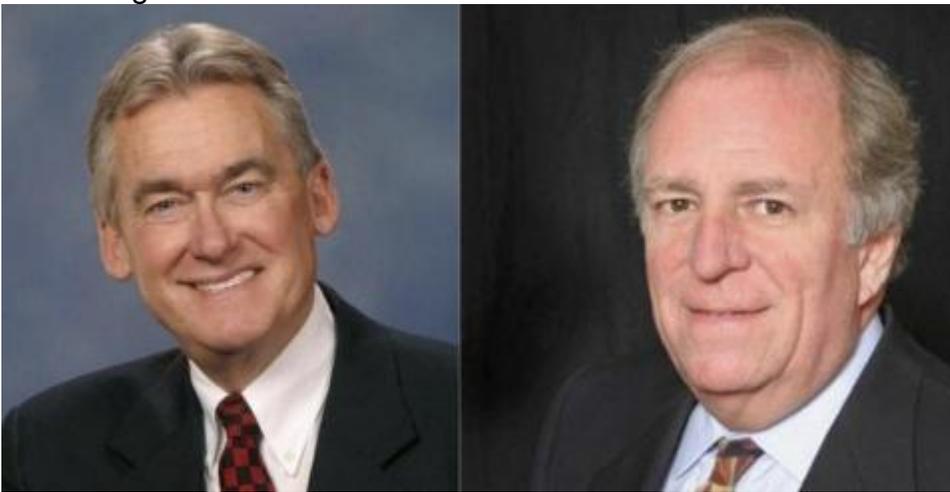


Image: Mark Meadows and Vic Loomis

Two former East Lansing mayors are speaking out against what they see as conduct unbecoming by four sitting Council members, including the current mayor. Asked to comment on the new political mailer ^[2] from developer DTN's political organization which includes a letter from the four sitting Council members urging the "yes" vote DTN wants, former mayor Mark Meadow said the mailer "makes the queasy meter explode." Meadows told me, "I do not think that a letter like this, which identifies Council Members as closely associated with a developer and its un-reviewed project, has ever previously been authored in East Lansing. I hope I never see one again."

Former mayor Vic Loomis, meanwhile, calls the way the letter was arranged by the four Council members "reprehensible." The letter was arranged behind closed doors by Mayor Nathan Triplett, Mayor Pro Tem Diane Goddeeris, and Council members Kathy Boyle and Susan Woods, without any notice given to the fifth member of Council, Ruth Beier. Beier has opposed authorization of the sale because, she says, this Council is more concerned with developers' interests than the interests of the citizens.

Loomis told me that the letter's closed-door production "may very well have not violated the

letter of the law in terms of the Open Meetings Act, but in my opinion, it clearly violates the spirit of that act. More concerning to me is that it violates the spirit of the democratic process?the salient point of the democratic process being that public bodies conduct citizens' business in public, and through a formalized and noticed agenda. And for a given Council member to be cut out of the process all total is reprehensible to me.?

Beier objects to the process as well as the wording of the letter: ?The letter starts off with, ?As members of the East Lansing City Council,? implying that the Council wants voters to approve the question. But I am on the Council, and didn't even find out about the letter until it was published. I find this misleading and disrespectful.? The mailer doesn't explain that ?East Lansing Park District Committee? is operated by DTN, so some citizens think the Committee is the same as Council. (Some have even complained that the City paid for this mailing, not realizing DTN did.)

Beier also objects that ?the letter was paid for by the developer that would profit from a ?Yes? vote. While this might be legal, working hand in hand with the developer to sway the public is just wrong. Even if I supported the proposal, I would not have participated in the letter.?

As we reported yesterday ^[3], Woods says she did not know, when Triplett asked her to sign the letter, that the mailing would be paid for by DTN's political organization, East Lansing Park District Committee.

Boyle says she *did* know when Triplett asked her to sign, and stands by her decision to participate. Boyle says a yes vote will ?will support new development west of Abbot Road.? Goddeeris has not answered questions about whether she knew when she agreed to sign that DTN was paying for the mailing.

Beier and Meadows also expressed to me significant distress over what they see as blatantly misleading statements in the new mailer. Beier gives as an example, ?it says that a ?no? vote will stop the planning process. In fact, staff are working on other development ideas in case of a ?no? vote.? She also says that ?the letter misleads voters by referring to blighted properties in the Park District. When people read this, they will think of the big Bank building and surrounding properties on the corner of Abbott and Grand River. But those buildings are not part of the ballot question or the proposed development! The sale of the parking lots is completely unrelated to and would not address the blight on the corner of Abbott and Grand River. Voters should not be tricked about so important an issue.?

Before seeing the mailer, ELi decided to dedicate this week's Ask ELi ^[4] to clearing up voter/reader confusion on that very point because so many readers and voters think (erroneously) that the ballot question is about the blight at the corner of Grand River and Abbot. (See a video explanation ^[5].)

Meadows objects strongly to what he considers very misleading claims made by DTN in the mailer, most especially that a ?no? vote will derail the redevelopment process and that a ?yes? vote will fix the blight about which most people are concerned (i.e., the blight at Grand River and Abbot).

He adds, ?The letter [from the four Council members] itself is just as false. It states that the

planning process will be stopped in its tracks. This is completely untrue, [because] this vote, either way, does not stop any planning process.?

Meadows says he is not surprised if he encounters a developer who may ?shade, shave, manipulate and mischaracterize facts in order to achieve a result that will benefit the developer. I am not excusing it but hey, it's business and every developer that comes before council should be greeted with skepticism.? He adds that ?while not excusing it, I expect them to try to mislead the public regarding the effect of this vote.?

But, he says ?What I don't expect is Council members misrepresenting the effect of a ?no? vote to citizens of the community. That is a really bad thing.? He says this is supposed to be ?democracy in action and it is very important for the Council to be accurate in its communications on the subject of the vote. The content of the letter signed by four Council Members is untrue and can only be interpreted as being intentionally untrue. Why any Council Member would sign this letter is a mystery to me.?

I asked DTN to respond to Meadow?s challenges to the claims made in the new mailer, but they have not answered.

Loomis kept his comments to how the letter was produced. He said his "final comment" was "I'm embarrassed for the city."

Note: Through an uploading error, the last paragraph was originally omitted from this article. It was added on October 31 at 7 am.

Disclosure: Vic Loomis is the Vice President of ELi's Board of Directors. As is the case for all of our Board members, he is unpaid.

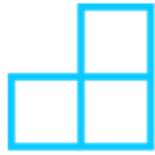
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