

Viewpoints

Why I voted no.

Editor's note: This is a summary of Lindsay McCormick-Welch's comments read into the minutes of the Wilson Brewer Park Commission's Tuesday meeting, with limited edits. She voted against the motion passed by the Commission on Tuesday.

Here are my thoughts: I did see some loopholes and general loss of control by the city. I wasn't aware the idea of a Foundation board would be that separate from the City (of Webster City). I was thinking it was a proposal that the (existing) city advisory board would be reorganized but still report back to the City.

I do see a hiccup being that, if the legal conditions to the original gift of the park land and Bonebright collection to the City was that it was to be operated and maintained by the City, then my question is: Should the City legally be able to, or should it morally be able to – knowing the original intent by the founder's family – enter an agreement to have it governed by someone else, i.e., the Foundation.

I'm just wondering how the taxpayers of the city and even county will be able to be represented ongoing after the election if the Foundation isn't directly reporting for permission from either the City or County.

That's how I read it, that they no longer are an advisory board to City or County, so essentially no checks and balances if a few decided to push an agenda and not communicate to the rest of the Foundation board. Decisions that cannot be undone with have no checks and balances outside of twice-yearly elections.

Also, the salary of a curator and staff members working on site for all the other Wilson Brewer Park buildings, that's going to be a pretty heavy expense. We do not even have current City budget funds for paid staff for the existing multiple buildings we've already invested a significant amount into to be open to the public, particularly without the museum being open any regular hours. Prior to that we only had funds to have the Depot building open with staff and the (Mulberry Center) Church open relying on an unpaid volunteer. The rest of the history and buildings have been unavailable to the public.

This is something I have continued to not understand and on which I have voiced my opinion. Why are we first not obligated

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to maintain and preserve the buildings and historical artifacts we do have the responsibility to preserve and prevent further deterioration prior to committing to large fiscal expenses of acquiring new assets, i.e., constructing buildings or purchasing additional artifacts, pursuing projects, etc? Our primary budget expenses and fundraising efforts should reflect our primary obligation of preservation of our historical artifacts we already are responsible for and to making the history (already current buildings filled with history and artifacts) readily available to the public.

I'm also concerned, since we were appointed by the City to have the agenda of giving the city advisory on its best interests, if we should be in support of an agreement in which the City would lose control and incur more financial burden. If the WBP is a city or county park, the issue arises to how do we have the new building be income producing/sustainable? How can we charge for admission or rentals if it is, in fact, owned by the taxpayers already?

So, it would need to be sustainable on donations and public funds from the City or County. I don't think the creation of a Foundation alone is going to be able to secure adequate funds to support WBP long-term, or the proposed project to be completed quickly, or funds/donations drastically different than we are already pulling in.

A large fundraising campaign effort was already in place these past years, so the same people fundraising under a different name I am doubtful will create largely different results to support a project this size.

The park, as you know, is not self-sufficient and we still have buildings with much-needed repairs and want/needs lists that aren't yet filled. With a Foundation board responsible for securing funds I don't think the park has a positive future for the upkeep of Webster City history and even the few pieces of Hamilton County history we have. These are history pieces belonging to the public and the public should have primary governance of the park and artifacts versus a Foundation.

We could definitely work alongside an additional Foundation board, but I believe it's

in everyone's best interest for that Foundation to be either reporting to and given direction by WBP committee (whose direction would be made out of prior approval to WBP committee by City Council of Webster City) or Webster City Park and Rec Department, or the Foundation, should report and be given direction and approvals directly by City Council of Webster City.

It would be very nice to acquire the mentioned property; it's unfortunate it was proposed to the county along with the idea to be used for a concept of a project and the concept of a new Foundation board. Had it been approached differently, we very well could have secured a fair exchange/deal with the County without these other proposals that I just don't feel are in the City's best interest, or the City of Webster City taxpayers' best interest.

I would be open to considering it if it remained the same WBP committee reporting and getting direction directly from the City Council. I am in favor of considering creating an additional Foundation board that worked alongside of the present WBP committee similar to how the Hamilton County Fair Board and Hamilton County Fair Foundation work together. A Foundation would need to get approval of projects from WBP committee prior to fundraising, but that allows two separate boards: one to focus on overall park and preservation, and another to focus on new projects and fundraising.

What is currently being proposed is that a Foundation board would operate and manage Wilson Brewer Park, leaving the City of Webster City financially responsible for, example, insurance and a curator and possibly leasing mentioned property from the County. But the City, then, does not govern the Wilson Brewer Park, its buildings, its historical artifacts or land properties. Decisions on these will be made solely by the proposed Foundation. This is where I feel it's not in the City's best interest or the taxpayers' best interest. It's similar to taxation without adequate representation. For the Wilson Brewer Park itself, I feel it's a bad deal because in this proposal the City of Webster City is less financially

responsible for other costs and upkeep to the park. The County would not be responsible for these either. It would be up to the Foundation to operate, maintain and secure private donations to keep the park operating and history preserved.

This is everyone's history; it should not rely on the efforts of a five-member Foundation to secure funds and operate, a situation that could prove to be insufficient. This public park needs public funding and public governance to guarantee its preservation for generations to come.

At the last Wilson Brewer Park meeting this is what was told to us: The Dean Bowden family is committing to donating \$1 million dollars to be placed in the Wilson Brewer Park endowment fund to be used primarily towards a curator salary at Wilson Brewer Park. The County is currently only willing to donate or lease proposed property if a Foundation board is created to solely maintain and operate Wilson Brewer Park, and that said land is to be used for building the mentioned concept of a building.

If said Foundation is created and said land leased or donated to the City of Webster City for Wilson Brewer Park, and said building concept is approved by the Foundation, then orally Dean Bowden has committed to providing seed money towards the building of said building in hopes it will be an incentive to other donors to donate the remaining funds needed to complete the building. It is a term of the County that said build will need to start next year and be completed in three years.

I encourage everyone to contact the City Council of Webster City with your opinions of support or concern. Please see their contact information at the bottom of this page.

The Wilson Brewer Park approved Tuesday four to one to send this motion to City Council to vote on. I was the nay vote.

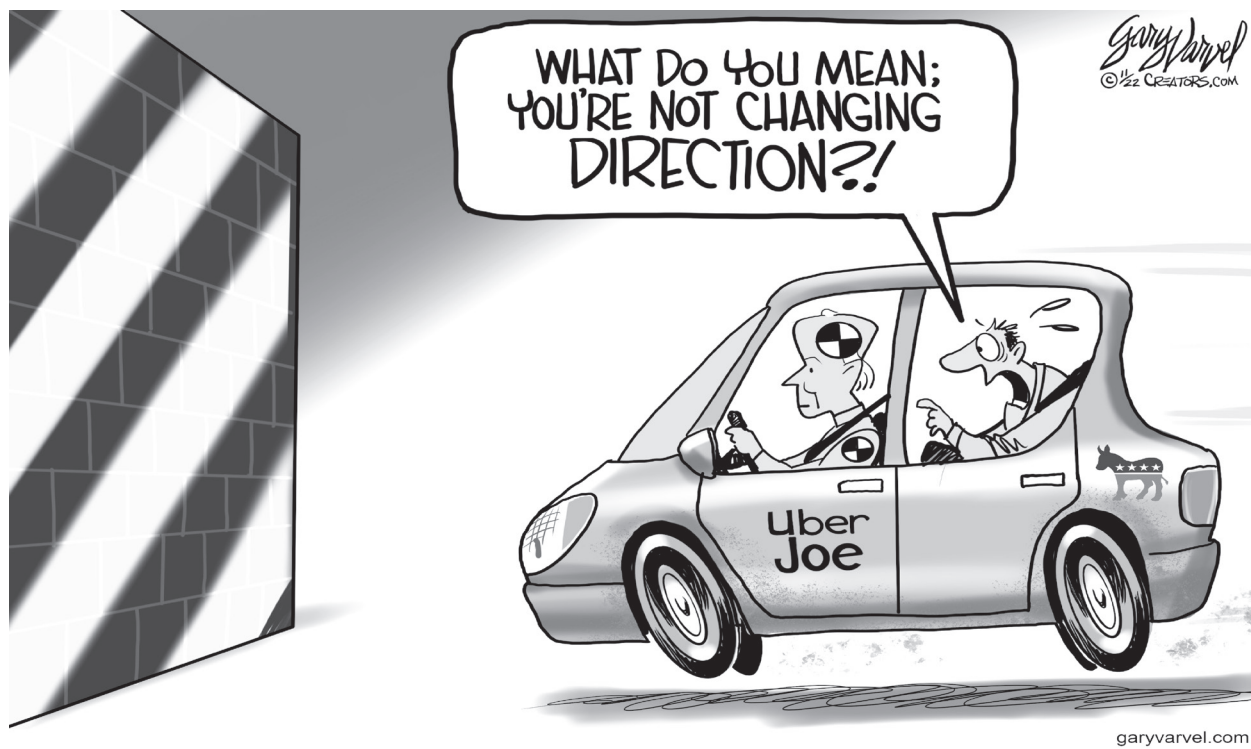
It is also to be presented to vote on by the Parks & Recs Commission at its meeting on Thursday. This could potentially affect other Park & Rec budgeting and presently slated and future projects for the City of Webster City.

Lindsay McCormick-Welch is a member of the Wilson Brewer Park Commission.



The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”



How to Reach Federal Officials

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How to Reach Your City Council members

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City Council meetings are held the first and third Mondays of the month at 6 p.m. at the Council Chambers in City Hall.
For more information, contact the City Manager's office, 832-9151