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AN EDITORIAL

Is there something to hide?

Owensville Second Ward Aldermen Rob Borgmann and John Kamler, with additional comments from Owensville City Administrator John Tracy, were correct to protest the conduct they witnessed at a meeting March 19 in Rolla.

Dan Watkins, general manager of Rolla Municipal Utilities, apparently hosted the meeting, or "workshop" as he prefers to call it, about Missouri Public Energy Pool (MoPEP) and energy transmission fees being passed on to MoPEP member communities, including Owensville. Mr. Watkins contends that the meeting was by invitation only, and allowed Aldermen Borgmann and Kamler to stay only after Mr. Tracy interceded on their behalf.

A Rolla City Councilwoman was not as lucky. Mr. Watkins denied Councilwoman Donna Hawley from Rolla's Sixth Ward access to the meeting room and had Rolla police forcibly escort her from the building. The news media, including a reporter from The Republican who accompanied the Owensville contingent thinking it was an open meeting, also were denied access.

"It was not a public meeting," Mr. Watkins said. "It was the equivalent of a staff meeting and the public was not invited."

That is akin to a department head in Owensville having police remove an alderman for attempting to attend a department staff meeting. We would like to think that would

not happen, and if it did the consequences would be severe.

Elected officials and employees of a government entity who establish and set public policy and deal with public money must be answerable for those policies and the expenditures of tax dollars. Mr. Watkins appears to believe he runs a small third-world country governed by a dictator instead of a municipal utility in this country.

In the letter sent after the meeting to Mr. Watkins and Rolla City Manager John D. Butz, who incidentally apparently was not invited to the meeting either, Aldermen Borgmann and Kamler said: "We want to go on record stating that we are not in agreement with how the beginning of the meeting was handled. We were never advised that this was an invitation-only meeting. We believed this to be an open meeting and anyone should be able to attend, especially an elected official. We do not condone what happened this morning."

To which Mr. Tracy added: "First of all, thanks for hosting this meeting. Second, it is, as my aldermen pointed out, unbelievable how an elected official of Rolla was treated."

We agree and hope the Rolla Municipal Utilities Board of Directors and the Rolla City Council properly discipline Mr. Watkins.

—Bob McKee