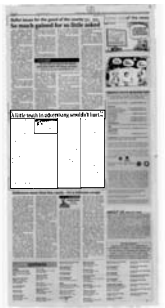


Christian  
County  
Headliner News  
Ozark, MO  
Circ. 5750  
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10/28/2009  
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# A little truth in advertising wouldn't hurt <sup>800</sup> <sub>241</sub>

Lets have a little truth in advertising here.

First, I don't want to argue with Presiding Christian County Commissioner John Grubaugh, but his perception of reality and mine diverge on a couple of points.

First, the Sunshine Law is not complicated. It gets complicated when government officials try to evade or circumvent it. It's complicated when officials try to carve out reasons why something should be kept secret. The exceptions are very clear: Personnel matters that deal with a person's specific work file and rights to privacy; litigation discussions that may give adversaries an advantage and harm the taxpayers; real estate discussions that may give sellers or buyers of property an advantage or disadvantage that may harm taxpayers' interest.

The Sunshine Law was never meant to provide cover for uncomfortable discussions. But that's what happens. I've been covering government for a long time and I've seen it over and over again at various meetings throughout the county.

Grubaugh and Eastern Commissioner Tom Huff settled with the Attorney General's office a couple of months ago over a suit filed in January 2008 for Sunshine Law violations. That was about a year after Western Commissioner Bill Barnett settled. Grubaugh's argument for finally settling the

protracted lawsuit rings hollow because Barnett settled almost immediately and agreed to the same sanctions.

The fine was \$1,000 each for "knowing violations." It is in black and white. Because of stipulations of the settlement, the fine was reduced to \$100 if the commissioners participate in Sunshine Law training and provide the AG's office with agendas and minutes for a period of time.

I agree that hiring a county counselor may have been prudent with taxpayers' interest at heart, but I was at that meeting when he was introduced to the office holders as the new county counselor. There was no vote. Now there may have been a vote at another time, but it was never noticed on an agenda item.

Was it intentionally done to avoid scrutiny? Perhaps. At best it was an oversight that became compounded by a defensive strategy of missteps. Things went from bad to worse and frankly, I'd like to think the commissioners learned from their mistakes and plan not to make any more like them. But rewriting history isn't a good start and that's disappointing.

Now to the acrimony between Ozark Mayor Brad Jackson, the Board of Alderman and the Ozark Parks Board. It's unnecessary.

Finley River Park and the OC are beautiful facilities that if left up to the current philosophy of the majority of

the aldermen, would have never happened in the first place.

The mudslinging is demoralizing to the city's staff.

The state audit cast enough aspersions throughout the entire city government—there's little reason to focus most of the negative attention on the parks department—when frankly, it is that department that is probably making the biggest positive impact in the community.

Sure, anything can be improved so both boards need to step back and find a way to amicably resolve their differences for the benefit of Ozark residents.

Each board must respect each other. Former Alderman Eric Griessel is a detail-man and now a member of the park board. He's confident in that board's ability to do its job.

And, according to the city code and state statute the park board shall have "exclusive control of the expenditures of all money collected to the credit of the Park Fund and of the supervision, improvement, care acquisition and custody of the parks."

That's not complicated either.

