



Columbia Daily  
Tribune  
Columbia, MO  
Circ. 19300  
From Page:  
4  
3/15/2011  
19182



# 800 Editorial

THE TRIBUNE'S VIEW

## Review board

### Going secret?

**T**he Columbia Citizens Police Review Board is discussing whether to hold closed sessions when plaintiffs and officers are testifying about disciplinary disputes.

Some members of the board say aggrieved residents are less likely to talk about their complaints in open session, and police officers might worry about potential liability, but others oppose secrecy as contrary to the very purpose behind the original creation of the board: to reveal internal department disciplinary decisions.

The board's proceedings should remain open. Under the "personnel" exemption of the state Open Meetings and Records Law, almost everything the review board considers could be heard behind closed doors, contrary not only to the proper purpose of the board but to the spirit of the law, as well.

Open sessions protect the interests of the public and everyone involved and rationalize the arguments on all sides. Standing the test of public scrutiny is the ultimate protection in a democracy. The law's personnel exemption is designed to protect a legitimate private interest of an employee, not to make debates more comfortable for participants. Even though the language of the law explicitly calls for a bias toward openness, the personnel and legal exemptions are routinely abused as excuses for secrecy.

The police review board in particular should not succumb to this temptation. It was, indeed, founded as a way to open up disputes over police proceedings, not provide one more layer of secrecy. Openness in government activities is designed for the benefit of the public, not a select group of insiders who happen to be members of a review panel.

HJW III

### Sewer leaking

**A**n important measure of good city governance is the attention paid to obscure, boring elements of the public weal.

If any item of business so qualifies, surely it is leakage into the sanitary sewer system.

Yes, I said "into." Millions of gallons of rainwater leaks into the city sewage treatment plant, overloading the system unnecessarily. The problem stems from faulty stormwater systems, usually in and around older homes. The effect is astonishing. City officials say the volume of water treated at the plant can reach 60 million gallons a day after a heavy rain. Normally about 16 million gallons is processed.

Obviously, it behooves us all for stormwater drains to be nice and tight, sending water to authorized destination in creeks and rivers. Perfection is impossible, but to improve the situation, the city will offer financial assistance to homeowners with stormwater problems.

I know this is not an exciting subject, but it's a sign city hall is paying attention.

HJW III

*Some people will see the light only when they feel the heat.*