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On Monday evening eight city/town officials from Bloomington and Normal made a visit to Peoria to attend the City Council meeting preceded by a pre arranged visit with Mayor Jim Ardis, City Manager Pat Urich, and councilmen Bill Spears and Ryan Spain. Those attending from Bloomington were: Mayor Steve Stockton, City Manager David Hales and Councilmen Jim Fruin, Mboka Mwilambwe, Steve Purcell and myself. Those attending from Normal were Mayor Pro Tem Sonja Reece and councilwomen Cheryl Gaines.

When I organized the visit to Peoria there were four objectives: First was to improve the camaraderie in the Bloomington council by encouraging as many of the ten elected officials and city manager to join the visiting group. This was the sixth visit to other community city councils, and it is the one with the most attendees. The camaraderie aspect in these visits takes place naturally in the drive to and from as well as in the dinner after the meeting. Second was to improve cooperation on issues with Town of Normal officials. This also happens naturally as informal discussions on a variety of issues are discussed during each phase of the evening. Third was to enhance the relationship with the Mayor of Peoria, which was definitely accomplished. There will likely be a meeting with leadership of Bloomington and Peoria in the future as a result of our visit. Fourth was to discuss and learn about specific issues where one city or the other had more experience, and this was certainly accomplished as you will see below.

The 30 minute meeting with the Peoria leaders allowed free form discussion on a variety of topics listed below:

- 1. Frustration with the state pension reform needs.**
- 2. Challenge of city budget issues in Peoria, which has improved its annual deficit to under \$1 million from much higher annual deficits in recent years.**
- 3. Difficulty in dealing with union contract issues in today's economic environment.**
- 4. Effectiveness or lack thereof by the Illinois Municipal League in representing cities of our size.**
- 5. Decision to allow video gaming which Peoria recently passed.**
- 6. Response time of four minutes for fire fighters in Peoria which is being consistently met. Bloomington response time goal is six minutes which is being consistently met.**
- 7. Handling of ambulance and transport to hospitals in Peoria is with private companies.**
- 8. Local user fee added to Motor Fuel Tax has been two cents per gallon in Peoria for as long as any of the officials could remember. At the time it was implemented**

the surrounding communities which did not add a similar user fee noticed that the gas stations in their communities simply increased their prices by two cents, thereby increasing their profits rather than the communities benefiting from an increased user fee. Therefore, if Bloomington and Normal were to implement a local user fee together, then both would benefit. If one community did not, then the gas stations in that community would benefit instead of the community increasing revenue to be used for road repair. For comparison, in Champaign the four cent per gallon local user fee provided \$1.5 million in revenue annually. Pekin currently has a four cent per gallon local user fee. There is a significant trend by nearby communities implementing local user fees to aid in road repair, which is the mandated use of any revenue a community generated from this user fee.

9. Collection of garbage, yard waste and recycling is contracted with a private company in Peoria

All in all, this exchange of ideas was quite useful because our communities (Peoria, Bloomington and Normal) are at different stages of addressing many of the same issues.

It is valuable to learn from the research and experience of the community which has led the way on an issue.

Let me share some random comments regarding the general experience of attending the Peoria City Council meeting in no particular order:

- 1. The Peoria City Council meets in a historic building from the 1880s, and the interior council chambers are visually appealing. Council members and administration were attired in suits and ties.**
- 2. The meetings are televised.**
- 3. Voting is displayed electronically and visible to the audience. This saves time of the city clerk needing to call on each council member on each vote.**
- 4. Mayor controls a timer visible to the council members and the audience, and the time limit seemed to be five minutes for any person speaking.**
- 5. Meeting scheduled to start at 6:15 p.m. actually started at 6:20 p.m.**
- 6. The council is composed of five at large and five district members (a modified ward system).**
- 7. Meeting began with a moment of silence/prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance.**
- 8. Mayor Jim Ardis introduced Mayor Stockton and welcomed city officials from Bloomington and Normal.**
- 9. Attendance was standing room only.**
- 10. The celebration of the retirement of the City Clerk and welcoming of the new City Clerk (a 20+ year employee in the City Clerk office) took nearly 30 minutes with the speeches, etc.**
- 11. Every one of the thirty-two Consent Agenda items was read in its entirety by the City Clerk in addition to being provided in the agenda given to each council member and anyone in the audience seeking an agenda. This seemed like a waste of time. Seven of the 32 Consent Agenda items were pulled and discussed as Regular Agenda items.**

12. There was considerable time spent discussing the \$650,000,000 P-2 Corridor recommendation of the State of Illinois only to pass 8 For and 1 Against. Based on the success during the first six visits to city council meetings in other communities, I plan to continue to organize such visits. Hopefully each city council member will be able to participate in at least one future visit to personally observe achieving the four objectives mentioned in the second paragraph.

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