rEmarks Data for October 17, 2023 Village Council Meeting

Agenda Section: First Reading
Agenda Item: ORD 2023-10057 A. Ordinance: Establishing Video Gaming Regulations
Commenter: Karen King
Comment: Please Vote No for Video Gaming. Let the video gamers go to Westmont or Oakbrook Terrace. The Village of Downers Grove is better than succumbing to normalizing this form of entertainment/vice. Thank you.

Agenda Section: First Reading
Agenda Item: ORD 2023-10057 A. Ordinance: Establishing Video Gaming Regulations
Commenter: David Rose
Comment: Strange bedfellows

The absurdity of VC debate was on full display in 03 Oct's discussion of expanding video gambling in DG.

The four comms indicating support for the idea are two of the conservatives and two of the libs. The three against are two of the conservatives (the Repub CC and the Dem CIW) and one of the libs.

Notably, the reasons given by the conservs to permit video gambling contradict each other. Which suggests an arbitrariness in their support: pick from the menu of plausible rationales to justify your vote.

The professed compromise nature of the proposed ordinance exemplifies the absurdity: gambling is no longer moral objectionable but DG will nevertheless
a) limit the number of licenses,
b) confine gambling licenses to restaurants with liquor licenses, and
c) put machines in a separate physical space in the eatery, where the gamblers can enjoy themselves without disturbing everyone else.

Because nothing says morally and socially acceptable like putting gambling machines in a separate space within the establishment. And encouraging people to gamble while they're eating and drinking.

Because the first thing someone thinks of in choosing a place to share a meal with friends or family is a place that has video gambling machines.

As usual, the discussion was almost completely devoid of useful data.

Comm GI is for the ordinance because as an eatery owner he is serving his fellow eatery owners who are asking for it.

Comm D is for it to fulfill a campaign promise. No further explanation given. Does he really fear being voted out of office if he reversed his position?

Comm S-F is for it because she's was for it before, when she was in the minority. And DG now has a social worker so gambling addicts can call if they need help.

In public comments, proponents claimed DG eateries are losing out to those in towns that permit the machines. They provided no actual data to support the claim, only anecdotal assertions.

But what about the alternative possibilities that

a) people may avoid patronizing an eatery with gambling machines

b) eateries having trouble staying in business may reflect an oversupply of eateries, particularly given the current difficult economic environment

Does VC or EDC have any thoughts/data on either of these possibilities? I would bet not.

Comm T outdid himself in his pontification explaining his support for passing the ordinance.

The essence of his remark: it's another opportunity for him to show he is 'business-friendly.' As if the measure is an indicator of being biz friendly.

He claims the ordinance is another means by which VC can help retain businesses in DG. Really? Where's the data?

Indeed, I wish VC or EDC had data on business retention, but they don't. And neither VC nor EDC has shown any inclination to collect it. [Why would they bother?]

Lemon Tree comes to mind as a handy example of VC giving concessions not once but twice in an attempt to support/retain a small business. And last time I looked, it's gone.

Given the division of opinion on the video gambling in DG, both within VC and among residents, the idea of putting the ordinance to referendum was broached.

Comm T shot that notion down, firmly asserting "we don't govern by referendum" in DG. As if he were the main and trusted authority on the notion. I interpreted his comment to reflect nothing more than his obvious desire to continue VC's autocratic ways.

I would agree however a referendum in this case is not appropriate because video gambling is such a lame and insignificant issue to put to referendum.

One interesting point of agreement between the proponents and opponents: video gambling is not likely to be a big revenue generator for VC. Unless DG allows gambling cafes. Which no one on VC is supporting at this juncture.

According to data Comm GI provided, if VC wanted to raise revenue, it should simply increase the food and beverage tax.

Indeed, I would contend that Comm Gi's data on gambling revenue per machine implies adding gambling machines in DG is likely to LOWER per-machine revenue for every machine, including existing ones, in the area … unless there is tremendous pent-up demand in DG currently thwarted by the lack of nearby machines. And of course, no one has data showing that to be the case.

For that matter, the widespread availability of gambling by internet app may be a contributor to falling per-machine revenue. AND ironically, gambling by phone app makes "more sense" as a social activity among a party of restaurant patrons — instead of monitoring their social media, they could be gambling 'together' while they eat.

Comm Gi's mention of casino gambling as a source of education funding is for me testimony to the cowardice of pols everywhere including here in IL to deal with the

inequity — the inequality and inadequacy — of the funding of not just K12 education but all public services.

Extrapolating, that fact emphasizes that pols around the country, including here in IL, are typically cowards unable to budget and tax properly.

On the one hand then, local pols rely on property taxes because they control the mechanisms of taxation of property (most notably its valuation). But on the other hand, because of the asymmetry in that arrangement and how hated property taxes are as a result, the local pols have to look like they are not abusing that power, and thereby risk getting voted out of office.

Sidenote: We have perhaps no clearer evidence of the absurdity of this inequitable reliance on property taxes than the trial now taking place regarding the Trump Organization and its ‘flexible’ valuation of real estate property.

When government needs revenue, “sin taxes” become a handy target for taxation; if people are going to sin, the path of least resistance is for government to encourage and tax it.

Now that the pious don’t object to gambling outside the opportunities afforded by religious organizations, in the foreseeable future will Americans be able to avail themselves of sex from an industry that is legal, regulated, and taxed? What say you, Comm T?

Will video gambling in DG hurt the DG brand?

How would one tell? No one put forward a good answer for that question either.

But if VC agreed it did hurt the brand, Comm T assured that VC could reverse its support. As did a past VC about flag lots.

Whoa.

Did Comm T say “flag lots”?

What was he talking about?

True to form, in light of VC's recent dubious contribution to the Longfellow property fiasco, no one on VC bothered to ask him to elaborate. They let the comment pass, the sleeping dogs lie.

If only Marshall Schmitt had been sitting in the CC's chair.

As Comm Gi has asked, why is video gambling even considered a 'priority action item' compared to issues deserving of significant staff and VC attention? Both now and in future.

Given the political economic headwinds ahead, I will be surprised if video and other gambling survives as more than a remnant of its present self.

So sadly, with this ordinance we see that the newly constituted VC continues the DG VC tradition of voting based on personal biases and political preferences rather than anything approximating thorough investigation and analysis.

Sorry, Comm T, as was the case when you were CC and reported VC meeting its goal of environmental sustainability, your claims to the contrary in this case have no credibility either.

Not that the residents of DG seem to care.

Agenda Section: Comments of a General Nature
Agenda Item: Comments of a General Nature
Commenter: David Rose
Comment: Human services is a huge success?

As a priority action item, VM asserted the Human Services Commission (HSC) and program are a huge success.

Really?

Based on what data?

When was the last time a pol, including an un-elected one such as the VM, admitted a program was not a success?

What is the measure of success of the DG Human Services program? A: People calling the village social worker (SW).

How many calls? About 80 per month, about half of which originate with incidents involving the police dept.

[Thankfully, in DG, the police have been trained how not to escalate mental health and other crisis situations. And, given

a) that police in well-to-do towns like DG risk being sued if they should happen to shoot the “wrong person,”
b) such towns can be ‘more selective’ in their hiring of police, AND
c) such towns by definition are less likely to be inhabited by individuals experiencing such crises,

the risk of police shootings and instances of excessive force are at or near zero.]

In tracking call volume as a metric of ‘success,’ the SW makes no distinction about the seriousness of the nature of the issue generating the call. Each call counts the same.

Which is to say, the program has no objective identifiable as an improvement in the life of DG. Its only objective is to relieve the CC and police and/or fire dept of principal responsibility for fielding and handling such calls/incidents.

In his comments on 03 Oct, VM praised the HSC’s effort to raise residents’ awareness — shrink the ‘awareness gap’ in VM’s preferred terminology— of the existence of the SW.

Its campaign to raise that awareness is targeted at those age groups the call tracking data indicate are NOT calling as frequently as the other age groups. Remember: it doesn’t matter why someone calls, only that they call.

Will the ‘raise awareness’ campaign ever stop? If it does, then what will the HSC do to justify its existence?

VC congratulates itself for having hired a SW to answer phone calls that amount to a per month rate of contact of roughly 80/40,000 people (in the village)? Do the math: 1/5000 is what percent? Hint: 1/50 = 2%.

I challenge anyone to find the positive impact this program is having on DG.

As with a lot of what happens in DG, VC hiring a SW to field phone calls feels more like a conscience-laundering luxury of the well-to-do than an effort to address a significant social problem.

Well worth the SW's salary, surely.

Agenda Section: Comments of a General Nature
Agenda Item: Comments of a General Nature
Commenter: David Rose
Comment: What was the CC thinking?

If one attended or watched last month's library board meeting, one can't help but ask: what was the CC thinking in appointing Bill Nienburg to the library board?

Is Nienburg on the board to make a genuine contribution to its work or to pander to MAGA and far right Repubs in DG, hoping by voicing their tropes as a member of the board, his heightened visibility and 'courage' will launch him into some higher political office? And in so doing, yield the byproduct of negating the far right's criticism/skepticism of the CC?

Nienburg moaned about the library's spending practices as if the library, rather than the other taxing bodies of DG and past inability of all these bodies to budget and tax properly, was the principal reason for the rising taxes DG residents face in future.

Similarly, voicing a classic conservative trope, he scorned spending for library staff participation in professional conferences on grounds such spending paid for a public employee's vacation and as such prevented the hard-working taxpayers from being able to afford one for themselves. I look forward to Nienburg supplying the data of missed DG resident vacations justifying that claim.

He also moaned about being left out of the library's recent long-range planning activity. But …

During his commentary earlier in the year on the library's DEI objectives, beyond voicing his skepticism of their worth, Nienburg veered off into talking about STEM and about lost years of education with covid restrictions. I'll feel sympathy for such comments

when he puts forward a solution to the state's grossly inadequate and unequal funding of K12 education thanks to its reliance on local property taxes expended by local school districts.

Is he aware of the decades of lost education experienced by the children living in property poor districts? What is he prepared to do to address that problem?

Oh, that's right; that's NOT his problem. As I have noted repeatedly, residents of DG love the funding inequity because they believe it helps raise their property values.

Nor is Nienburg much of a fan of the land acknowledgement proclamation that VC foisted off to the library or of the specific citation of the Catholic Church's leading role in separating native children from their families in order to offer them (by Western Christian civilization standards) 'proper' cultural and religious education.

I infer from his comments he is a conservative Catholic and as such is quite pleased to have been born one of the lucky ones, a child of one of recent history's conquering people. I presume he is likewise grateful at least some of the unlucky ones will receive their reward for being unlucky in this life in their life in the hereafter.

How many people watching the annual midnight Christmas mass from the Vatican wonder how the Catholic Church went from the humble birth in the manger to the astounding structure that is St Peter's Basilica?

If the Pieta weren't housed in St Peter's, would it be any less impressive? Do Catholics find the sculpture inspiring, even though it depicts something for which we have no evidence it actually happened?

I wonder if Nienburg rails against the money, labor, and materials required to build and maintain the Basilica? Martin Luther in his day did; and the rest — as they say— is history.

Does Nienburg find the current Pope's way too liberal for his liking? Does he rail against him at gatherings of his local congregation?

Nienburg's remarks, by the way, got a standing O from the conservatives attending the Sep meeting.

Who knows? Perhaps Nienburg's presence on the board will generate further interest in electing the library board rather than leaving its membership in the hands of the CC and VC.

Agenda Section: Comments of a General Nature
Agenda Item: Comments of a General Nature
Commenter: David Rose
Comment: Protecting the DG brand

Congratulations to the CC for scrupulously avoiding controversy and thereby protecting the DG brand by not issuing a proclamation regarding indigenous people's day, known more bluntly as "yes, we stole your land but only some of us feel bad about it, and we'll get over it; and even if we don't, what difference will it make" day.

Congratulations also to VC for protecting the DG brand by NOT stepping forward to help address in any way the migrant crisis facing the US, IL, and Chicago.

Agenda Section: Comments of a General Nature
Agenda Item: Comments of a General Nature
Commenter: David Rose
Comment: Pension contribution stabilization coming?

If one reads the minutes from the April police pension board of trustees meeting,

https://www.downers.us/corecode/uploads/document6/uploaded_pdfs/corecode/Final%20Meeting%20Minutes%204.10.2023_948.pdf

one learns that VC's annual pension contribution is affected by the results of "smoothing" the impact of the ups and downs experienced each year in the pension fund's investments.

In particular, one can see beginning on page 24 of the minutes that the nine percent financial loss combined with the expected seven percent gain means the 'actuarial loss' was 16 percent!! But as stated on page 25, that loss is smoothed — spread out over five years.

Since gains exceeding the expected rate of investment return are also smoothed, the ‘outstanding gains’ from recent years helped avoid dramatic immediate changes in the annual contribution required to offset the smoothed loss.

[Also ‘helping’ reduce the impact of investment losses: reduced liability thanks to four retirees dying, only one of whom had a surviving spouse (who will continue collecting benefits). Staff turnover also helped, in no small part because of the less generous benefits accrued by Tier 2 compared to Tier 1 employees. Don’t you just love the euphemism!]

Fine and dandy.

Except for the worrisome fact that the recent “outstanding gains” experienced by investments were largely due to the Fed Reserve emitting trillions of dollars into the economy, actions which artificially inflated the nominal value of assets. Including residential real estate.

If losses continue, as investments are repriced to actual rather than inflated values (including in an inflationary environment when assets reprice relative to the rising cost of living day to day), smoothing may help slow the rate of increasing contributions taxpayers will be required to make but it will not eliminate it.

Given that VC has already cut staff to maintain its historically inadequate level of tax collections, what solution does VC imagine it uses to ‘stabilize’ the future pension fund contributions for which it has obligated residents to pay?

As VC intimated in its 03 Oct discussion, will VC expand video gambling opportunities in DG? Will that take care of it?

The April pension board minutes, for example, cite the unhappy experience of the town of Berwyn, which issued bonds intended to reduce its unfunded pension liability to zero, only to see the investment loss negate the impact of the bond contribution.

As I keep saying, taxing bodies in DG have been and are still playing catchup for failing to budget properly for decades. [A failure endemic to all levels of US govt.]

VC may pride itself for NOT collecting adequate property tax in the past, but voters — having now committed to paying off bonds for the school districts and VC — will need to find new ways to exploit non-residents if residents are to meet the rising funding required to meet pension obligations.

How do you think the exploited will respond?

Whose ox is going to be gored?

With funds and investment now aggregated at the state level, it should make for exciting political times in the not-too-distant future.

Agenda Section: Comments of a General Nature
Agenda Item: Comments of a General Nature
Commenter: David Rose
Comment: CC, please explain.

Does the CC care to inform the uninitiated of the specifics to which he alludes when he maligns state govt (as is typical of VC members) about the ‘circus’ state govt creates when distributing tax collections back to local municipalities?

Agenda Section: Comments of a General Nature
Agenda Item: Comments of a General Nature
Commenter: David Rose
Comment: Public comments on VC's agenda

Whoa!

VC has apparently moved, for the time being at least, the opportunity for public comment back to early in the VC meeting, rather than punishing/discouraging commenters by putting it late in the agenda order.

Does this shift deserve kudos; or should it be seen simply as the power move that it is, reflecting VC’s autocratic method of operating — providing an appearance of democracy without actual substance? Aka, as a way of ‘urging’ residents to keep their criticisms to a minimum or else VC will shift public comments back to late in the meeting.

Not unlike the way VC's beloved partner DG58 handles public comments.