

Dark store reform important to all of us

By Oshkosh Mayor Steven Cummings

The city of Oshkosh is taking a stand to address a disturbing trend in property valuation. This trend is shifting the burden of property taxes from big-box retail stores to homes and small businesses.

The term you may be familiar with is “dark store.” While some businesses have hired PR firms and lobbyists to spread misinformation, I wanted to explain to Oshkosh residents why this issue is important to you and what you can do to help us correct this unfair property tax shift.

Cities throughout Wisconsin are responsible for assessing the property values of residential and commercial properties. City assessors are given specific rules to follow by the state of Wisconsin. Our assessor’s goal is to make sure that there is consistency in property values so that everyone is paying their fair share.

In 2008 Walgreens sued the city of Madison and claimed that their properties were overvalued, even though Walgreens was being assessed for their actual sales price. Meanwhile, other big-box stores were arguing that their stores should be valued as if the store is vacant — a dark store. Their argument ignores the income

GUEST COLUMN

generated by these properties, as well as the arm’s-length transactions that occur when these properties sell for millions of dollars. Walgreens argued that their property should be valued at approximately 40 percent of its actual sale price.

Imagine if your neighbor argued that your property should be valued at its sale price, but theirs should be valued at 40 percent of the sale price. Does that make sense?

Instead of local assessors valuing properties using decades-long procedures, attorneys representing big-box stores are negotiating their own values and manipulating the courts and the well-established rules to reduce their assessments to below-market values.

Dark store reform will not increase the city’s collection of property taxes. Oshkosh is under strict levy limits from the state. What the city collects is fixed according to a formula established by the state.

If the value of a big box goes down, the tax bill is shifted to you, the homeowner, and small local businesses who don’t

have the benefit of triple net leases and out-of-state attorneys to manipulate their assessed values. Specifically, property taxes for Walgreens, CVS, Menards, Lowe’s, Walmart, Target and Fleet Farm all go down while your taxes go up to pay for their tax break.

Oshkosh and cities throughout Wisconsin have been working with the League of Wisconsin Municipalities to explain to legislators that dark store reform is necessary. Currently, 70 percent of the state Legislature is in support of dark store reform, so this is a welcomed bipartisan issue.

I would like to personally thank our local legislators, including Rep. Gordon Hintz, Rep. Michael Schraa and Sen. Dan Feyen, all of whom support dark store reform.

Unfortunately, state legislative leadership refuses to put the dark store issue up for a vote. I encourage you to contact Assembly Speaker Robin Vos at 888-534-0063 and ask him to put dark store reform legislation up for a vote. When 70 percent of your elected representatives want to see reform, one person should not hold it up.

Assisted-living project gets panel approval

By Tom Ekvall
HERALD CONTRIBUTOR

Plans for a new 52-bed assisted-living facility at Jackson Street and Snell Road were unanimously recommended for approval Aug. 7 by the Plan Commission.

Matthews Senior Living is proposing a one-story community base residential facility (CBRF) at the intersection on vacant land there. The CBRF will include 39 single occupancy and 13 double occupancy units, including a memory care component. The company has facilities in north-east and southeast Wisconsin.

The proposal requires a conditional use permit and general development plan because the number of units exceeds 16 on the 4.54-acre tract of land. The building will be placed between wetlands on the property.

The proposal, presented by Ben Ganther from Ganther Construction/Architecture, also calls for an additional 24 parking spaces to meet peak use by visitors to the building.

In other action, the commission recommended approval of a signage request for the McDonald’s restaurant at 1863 Jackson St., a historical marker for the Morgan House, and a zone change from institutional to institutional with planned development overlay so that River Valley Church can expand its parking area, including removal of a residential unit on the property at Congress Street and High Avenue.

Public Library will rock a block party Aug. 24

The Friends of Oshkosh Public Library will rock the block Aug. 24 with an end-of-summer party to raise funds for next year’s summer reading program.

The party from 4 to 7 p.m. in the library parking lot will feature Beatles tribute band The Britins in a rooftop concert starting at 5:30 p.m.

The band will perform a rooftop con-

cert a la the Fab Four’s infamous last live concert in 1969 atop their Apple Corp. headquarters in London.

“Since our summer reading theme this year is Libraries Rock, we thought a block party with live music would be a great way to bring people together to have some fun and support the library,” said Nancy Ebert, Friends president.

Back in the Day



Oshkosh history by the Winnebago County Historical & Archaeological Society

Aug. 18, 1903

Oshkosh lumberman gunned down:

Thomas R. Morgan, president of the Morgan Company and city alderman, was murdered in cold blood on the property of his lumber company. His assailant, Frederick Hampel, was an employee of the company. Reports indicate Hampel was extremely intoxicated when he approached Morgan out in the

yard around 10 a.m. this morning. There was a brief verbal exchange between the lumber magnate and the employee before Morgan turned and walked away toward Oregon Street. Hampel opened fire, shooting Mr. Morgan in the back. Another employee grappled with the assailant as more shots were fired before he was subdued. Reports say the incident was unprovoked and no reason for the assault was apparent. Morgan was transported to St. Mary’s Hospital but expired before arriving there. Hampel was transported to the lock-up and around noon was found dead in his cell, the result of suicidal actions.

Source: Oshkosh Daily Northwestern, Aug. 18, 1903

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