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March 14, 2014

Rochelle City Council
c/o Mr. David S. Plyman
Rochelle City Manager
420 North 6th Street
Rochelle, IL 61068

Re: Renovation of Hub Theater

Dear Mr. Plyman:

Following the architect's report to the City Council in April of 2013, I volunteered to spearhead an effort to promote the renovation of the Hub Theater, using landfill funds. The matter is now on the agenda for March 24, and I thought it would be appropriate to provide the councilmembers with a summary of the efforts made in this regard. Please include this letter in the council agenda packet for the March 24 meeting.

My efforts have been as a private citizen, not as City Attorney, and I have had the able assistance of an excellent committee. Committee members have included two City employees—Michelle Pease and Andrew Kida—and Rochelle citizens Renee Page, Raegan Carmichael, Sandy Mace and Connie Sabin. Our efforts have included developing a proposed plan for renovation and operation of the Hub Theater, production of a power point presentation and a brochure outlining those plans, gathering signatures on supporting petitions from Rochelle citizens and out-of-town folks, and creating and operating a facebook page dedicated to the renovation effort.

The power point presentation has been shown eleven times—once to the city council, four times to the general public, and six times to private groups. I would estimate that between 200-300 persons have attended these showings. As might be expected, there have been statements of support and of opposition voiced at these showings, and in some instances spirited discussions were generated. The brochures were handed out at each of the showings.

Sandy Mace and Connie Sabin have been primarily responsible for obtaining signatures on the petitions. As of this writing, approximately 500 citizens of Rochelle have signed the petition, indicating their support for the renovation and for the use of landfill funds for that purpose.

Additionally, approximately 100 non-citizens have signed petitions indicating their support and their willingness to attend performances at the renovated Hub Theater.

Andrew Kida has been primarily responsible for the facebook page, which has generated comments on both sides of the issue, and provided a forum for discussion.

The arguments in favor of the renovation project have focused primarily on the tremendous potential for revitalization of downtown Rochelle, and the grim prospects for downtown if the theater is allowed to continue to deteriorate and eventually be demolished. The arguments against the project seem to have fallen into three categories—first, that it is not a proper use of public funds; second, that there are better uses that could be made of the landfill funds; and third, that the theater renovation is a great idea, but it just won't work. I would like to address each of these arguments.

I respect the view that renovation and operation of a theater should be a matter for private enterprise and not a government function. However, it seems to me that we have long since abandoned this position in favor of using public funds to promote private businesses in the interest of "economic development" which will benefit all of the City. The City regularly supports new industry in the form of tax abatements. It has contributed some \$3 million toward the development of a super Wal-Mart store. Most recently, it has committed a large sum of money, together with the Park District, to save the golf course. Each of these efforts represents a subsidy of private enterprise by the City, made for good policy reasons. The theater project should be analyzed in the same manner, by balancing the anticipated "economic development" benefits to the City as a whole against the expected costs.

Various other uses for the landfill funds have been suggested, including using the funds for ongoing operations of the City in order to keep taxes lower, or applying the funds for further renovation of the Civic Center or construction of a new recreation center in the City. My response has been that it would be bad policy to rely on the landfill fund to support ongoing City operations, rather than particular "quality of life" projects, because the fund is finite. When the landfill is full, the income stream will cease. With respect to other potential projects, while they may be worthy projects, none of them hold out the potential benefit which renovation of the Hub Theater offers to downtown and to the City as a whole.

Finally, the argument has been made, in one form or another, that our plan for a full season of professional acts, with the cost covered by ticket sales, theater rentals, advertisements, and private underwriting, simply won't work. Three responses to this argument are in order.

First, it simply cannot be known in advance that a renovated, professionally-operated Hub Theater will lose money, and our discussions with people who are operating successful municipal theaters elsewhere leads us to believe otherwise.

Second, the downside "risk" is minimal. If the professional operation should fail to cover its costs, the City Council could decide to cease the operation and simply make the renovated theater available for rental. This in itself would be a valuable amenity to the City, although not

nearly so helpful to downtown as a successful professional operation. Renovating the theater would also enhance its marketability, should that become the goal.

Third, if no effort is made to renovate the Hub Theater, the detrimental effect on downtown Rochelle can scarcely be overstated. No one has suggested any other realistic plan that I am aware of for revitalizing downtown Rochelle. A renovated Hub Theater is essential to downtown recovery. Without that renovation, the theater will continue to deteriorate and will eventually be torn down, and downtown Rochelle will increasingly consist of empty storefronts and little else.

This council has the opportunity to be the body which turns Rochelle's fortunes around and points the City toward a bright future. That process begins with this theater renovation project. I would respectfully request that the City Council take the first step in this direction by authorizing the City Manager to enter into negotiations for the purchase of the theater.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Alan H. Cooper".

ALAN H. COOPER

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