

# Mary Jo's Heye-lights

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## Oh Maryland, “MY” Maryland

This was the hardest vote during my time on Sherwood City Council. My head and my heart simply wouldn't agree. In the end, against my emotional heart, against the line in the sand I drew in my last newsletter, I voted to agree to the subdivision and development deal between the city and the developer of Stone Hill Subdivision. The citizens of Sherwood need to understand why I voted the way I did. But first a little background.

The Stone Hill Subdivision was conceived and first platted about twenty years ago. It was a large multi-phase subdivision that controlled all the remaining land needed to finish the connection of Maryland Avenue between Highway 107 and Brockington Road. This connection was to be a major east-west street in our booming little city and the developer, as part of the subdivision plat, was going to build it. While the completion of Maryland Avenue was in one of the very first phases of the subdivision, the Maryland connection required a very expensive bridge spanning a creek and a broad floodway. We now know in today's dollars that the cost will be around \$1.3 million. In the end, the developer did not want to build the expensive bridge and the city had allowed him to develop the subdivision phases out of sequence. Both the Harmon administration (according to his son, City Council Member Charlie Harmon) and the Hillman-Young administration allowed all other phases Stone Hill Subdivision to be built leaving the phase with the uncompleted Maryland Avenue unbuilt. Maryland remained uncompleted.

Meanwhile, Sherwood has grown to a size that the traffic network built for a smaller city does not work anymore. In 2019 the City Council proposed and the Sherwood citizens approved a new ¾ cent sales tax for capital improvements, mostly for streets. Part of the promised street improvement package was to finally complete Maryland Avenue. There is money available to completely finish the street.

Now here is the twist: years ago, and after years of frustration, the City Council was presented an ordinance that would allow the city to build streets that developers did not build THEN place liens on the developer's adjoining property. The developer would have to pay the liens to develop the property, meaning they would ultimately pay for the road by paying the city back. This ordinance was written with Maryland (See **MARYLAND Pg 2**)

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( **MARYLAND Continued** ) specifically in mind. The City Council was assured that this ordinance was legal by the city administration – the mayor, the city attorney, and all other municipal officials. In good faith based on that assurance, the City Council passed that ordinance.

Except, now the ordinance is not legal. Apparently. The mayor and the city attorney now both concur with a legality opinion issued by the Arkansas Municipal League (non-binding) secured by City Council member and Street Committee Chairman Kevin Lilly, that any liens placed on the developer's property based on the provisions of this ordinance would not be enforceable under state law.

What does this mean? This means instead of paying the entire \$1.8 million dollar cost of the needed Maryland Avenue street connection and placing liens back on the developer's property like the ordinance stated, the new "best" deal for the city would be to "partner" with the developer. The partnership would entail the developer building those sections of street that can be developed with houses, roughly \$500,000 of \$1.8 million, and the city build the undevelopable sections of street with the expensive bridge, or the \$1.3 million dollar cost. In this deal, the cost of the land for street right-of-way (ROW) would be dedicated to the city for free. Otherwise, the city would build the entire street, bearing the entire \$1.8 million dollar cost, and pay for all needed ROW. Why, who wouldn't take that deal? GRRR!

This was why I followed my head, instead of my heart. I voted for the "deal" to get a necessary road built without risking a greater cost to Sherwood taxpayers. Just to make sure everyone knows, I chased every authority in municipal affairs and law I could, inside and outside of Sherwood. Not one would back the validity of the Sherwood ordinance. No one had heard of any similar ordinance. By every account I could find, this wasn't legal. From what I could find, I could not justify a vote against this "deal."

This feedback validated nothing I had previously been told. I felt deceived. The City Council had been sold a falsehood. Not only had the developer skipped out on what he had promised, the city administration had told the City Council it could make him do what it ( **Top of Next Column** )

ultimately could not make him do. Nope, nada, too bad! The City Council had been screwed over, twice.

The City Council voted 5–3 at its January meeting to agree to this Stone Hill development deal. It didn't matter, by the way, that I voted the way it did. A 4-4 tie would have let the mayor break the tie.

On this issue, as much as any other I have dealt with, I can understand and sympathize with every other City Council member. Yeh, frankly, I did want to join my fellow aldermen in the minority. I wanted to stick it to this developer for his bad faith. I wanted to stand on principle. However, I felt the city's bad faith had undermined any principled stand I could make. In the end, if I couldn't stand on principle and make the developer meet his obligations, then the only principle I had left was to do right by the Sherwood taxpayers. Holding my nose, I voted for approval of this deal.

I accept that this is disagreeable to many people who opposed my vote. I agree with you, and you can't imagine how much I agree with you. But I wouldn't change my vote. **MJHT**

( See **LESSON FROM MARYLAND** Page )

## **ATTENTION SENIORS**

**If you are a senior citizen or know of a senior citizen that is struggling to get signed up online for a vaccine or getting to an appointment, do not forget about the Senior Center in Sherwood. With a 24 hour or more notice, they can provide transportation to a doctor's appointment or vaccine appointment. They can also help you navigate the computers at the Center to set up an appointment, if needed. The Senior Center number is 501-834-5770 and are located at 2301 Thornhill Drive.**

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## Welcome the New Chief



**Chief John Sawyer**

**We have a new Fire Chief** over Sherwood Fire Department/District 5. Pulaski County Fire District 5, known as the Sherwood Fire District, named Battalion Chief John Sawyer as its new Fire Chief after the retirement of its former Chief David Teague.

Chief Sawyer started with the department April 9, 1995. While a college student at UCA, friends recruited him to volunteer with the Sherwood department. He quickly realized that this was not just a part-time job. It was a calling and he was hooked. He not only loved being a fire fighter but also really liked this department that he felt had so much potential. Over the years, he worked his way up the ranks as a paid volunteer, while also working other jobs. On March 1, 1999, he accepted a full-time position with the department. He still remembers that first shift which included putting out a boiler room fire at St. Vincent's North. He continued to **( Top of Next Column )**

promote through the department eventually becoming to Battalion Chief of Shift A. This was the position he held when he interviewed for the Chief position. He is very enthusiastic about this new position as well as the future of the department.

The Sylvan Hills and Sherwood Fire Departments merged in 2005, creating the Pulaski County Fire District 5/ Sherwood Fire Department. The district's three stations are currently located at Sherwood Avenue, Lantrip Road, and Hwy. 107. Because of recent growth in Sherwood, a fourth station will be built on Rapid Waters drive. The district is currently working on the design. It is hoped to be completed within two years. This will provide critical coverage in areas such as the Brockington Road neighborhoods and Miller's Crossing.

Station 4 will have a pump truck and pickup squad with plans for a 75-foot ladder truck. They will need 9 new fire fighters to man it. People think of fire fighters as those that put out fires but they do so much more than this. Most of their calls are medical. This extra station will improve response times in those underserved areas. Every second counts when there has been a stroke, a fall, and a heart attack, above and beyond a fire.

Chief Sawyer has many goals for this department. One of those goals includes getting the Class 1 rating that they have been working towards. They have made many communication upgrades and are in the process of applying for this new rating. This is the highest rating available. The new Station 4 will help achieve this goal. Station 3, on Sherwood Avenue, is also in urgent need of replacement. The District is considering moving it from it's current location in a neighborhood and very close to the city limits with North Little Rock. They are looking at sites on a more major street and more central to its response zone. This will help with response times throughout its zone. While the city needs to scrap the living quarters of the existing station, the garage part could be used by the Sherwood PD for SWAT storage.

Station 2 is located on Hwy. 107 near Sylvan Hills High School. Even though the interior is in good shape, the exterior definitely needs improvements. From the highway, the outside certainly doesn't **( See FIRE CHIEF on Page 4 )**

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## LESSONS FROM MARYLAND

Here are some takeaways from this Maryland Avenue debacle.

First, language matters. When City Council changed the Master Street Plan to call Maryland an arterial to get some funding, they were never told that this would mean that the developer could be or rather would be, let off the hook. The street was to be built to a Collector streets standard not an arterial. However, the classification on the Master Street Plan makes a huge difference on what one can ask a developer to pay for.

Second, developers and the city do not necessarily have the same interest. Developers are businesspeople and are as such looking to make as large of a profit as possible. Developers build streets that help them. They do not have any reason to build streets that do not help them. If forced, and it will not be profitable, they will just not build the street. The city must make sure it is putting the interests of its citizens first. Some developer and builders live in this city and they do want what is best long term for this community. However, not all do and thus the city must be careful.

Third, if the city needs a major street, the city needs to build the street. It also should not compromise on the timing of getting the streets built or building the street to the proper design standards. Sherwood is now too big of a city to do otherwise.

Fourth, if a street should be an arterial then the city should build a real arterial. We need to be more strategic in our thinking. Arterials are for moving people across town efficiently. They should not have driveways off them.

Fifth, what is reasonably required by city ordinances of the developer to build should be required to be completed (or a performance bond submitted) while the city still has leverage.

Sixth, while building arterial streets should not be asked of developers, there are other aspects of great cities that should be present in every neighborhood and commercial development. Sherwood should have those standards. In the end, this sells more ( See LESSONS Next Column )

( FIRE CHIEF Continued from Page 3 ) evoke pride in the passerby. However, these improvements are cosmetic and will not be done until the ownership of the building belongs to the department. Right now the Department has a long term lease from Central Arkansas Water/NLR for a dollar a year. Currently, there is talk in certain circles about acquiring title to this property.

I asked Chief Sawyer about the Gravel Ridge District merging with the Sherwood District. He stated that he has a good working relationship with their chief and both districts are open to this idea. Chief Sawyer was quick to point out that this is more of a political question involving both districts and Pulaski County. In this regard, Chief Sawyer is staying in his lane.

One of the things that he is very proud about is how efficiently this district is run. The City of Sherwood contributes less than \$1 million a year to this department. (County designated fire districts are primarily financed by dues from all property owners in the district collected with property taxes.) The City of Jacksonville contributes \$6 million dollars out of its General Fund budget towards its fire department and it is a Class 2 Department like Sherwood.

Overall, Chief Sawyer is very proud of his firefighters and their professionalism and dedication. He is thankful for the work of Chief Teague and looks forward to continuing to improve this department and help it grow along with the city. Welcome to the job, Chief Sawyer. MJHT

( LESSONS ) houses and house lots for developers also.

Finally, we make very costly mistakes as a city when there is not a City Planner on staff and no real strategic long-term planning. We cannot continue to take it day by day, winging it as we go. We are always behind trying to play catch up. This is a terrible strategy for developing into a great city. And to be a great city we cannot continue to keep missing critical opportunities that can make our city a more livable one in the future. MJHT

*What is Sherwood's 2020 Population? Send your guess to [maryjoheye@gmail.com](mailto:maryjoheye@gmail.com) Census results – Summer 2021*

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## THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

It is important that we never rest on our laurels. To be best we must be creative and innovative.

An example of this is Trail of Lights. Former City Council Woman, Sheila Sulcer came up with a wonderful idea with the Trail of Lights. Every year it has grown and gotten bigger. This year 27,268 cars experienced this attraction. This is the most that has ever gone through the trail. I was one of those cars. This program has clearly been a big success.

So, we have this successful attraction, how can we build on this? How many more displays do we need to put on the trail? Is this attraction bringing more business to our city?

So here is an idea, why not create another attraction in Sherwood for people to do before or after the trail of lights? We could light up the Municipal Complex and use those beautiful trees to make a magical place for families to walk around and enjoy. Use smaller artistic displays in the area. Light up the bridges (the bridge that crosses Kiehl and the small walking bridge by the pond) and use the pond area as well. Imagine a fountain with a light. And then that large parking area behind the building could have food trucks and vendors. Create a Christmas festival/winter wonderland feel. This could be built up over time, just like the Trail of Lights. And this would be a place for people to socialize and enjoy. Remember socializing? It could also bring in revenue.

It is important that we are always striving to do better and to be better. Ideas can come from many places and many people and we as a city need to always be open to them. **MJHT**

## Sherwood Getting into Land Speculation?

City Council Member Harmon brought up some land on 107 that was for sale that he thought we might want to look at. This land is approximately two acres and is on 107 by the Masonic Lodge. It had been mentioned when it was first brought up that this could be a possible Mems location. I asked if we had money available and was told that we do. It was mentioned that the price was really good. I thought it was worth a look.

However, when I took a closer look, I could not see a use or reason for this purchase. This would not be a good location for any emergency type of staging such as Fire or Mems. The reason is this location would be blocked during the trail of lights. It also would not work for the fire department due to the curve in the road. Unfortunately, the Sherwood Fire Department was not asked if they would be interested. For the record, they are not interested.

This land would not be good for a park. A small park on a busy highway does not make any sense and this is not an area in need of a park. This is not enough land for a sports building complex and we already have Sherwood Forest in that area.

While it would be nice to clean this lot up, however, this is not a reason to purchase it. When I looked around 107, I was surprised at how much land on Hwy 107 is for sale. There is actually a number of lots for sell in the near vicinity. My guess is this is the reason why the price of \$127k sounded low. **( See LAND on Page 6 )**

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( **LAND Continued from Page 5** ) There was an offer by a private party to buy the land at the same price. This is commercial property. Should the city be buying land that a private business could develop? Commercial property on a major street can potentially be developed and bring in sales tax revenue. Public property brings in no revenue.

A special meeting was called to vote on the purchase. I had wanted to be apart of this meeting an express my opinion, concerns, and to vote "No." However, a meeting on a Monday at 12pm for a school nurse is very difficult. This is one of my busiest times. I did express this but there were enough Council Members available at that time to make a quorum. Unfortunately, things at my work were crazy that day and by the time I finally took a breath and looked at a clock, it was 1:30 pm.

I called the Mayor to find out what I missed. I was told it passed 7 to 1. Kevin Lilly was the dissenting vote. I asked the Mayor what the plans were for this property and was told that there were no plans at this time. According to accounts, Kevin voiced the same concerns that I had.

I do think we need to be on the lookout for park land especially north of Sherwood Forest and in the Trammel area. However, buying land because we have some money available.... this I do not agree with. I am a big believer in goals and planning. **MJHT**

## Participate in ArDOT's East-West Connector Virtual Open House Now through March 21

*Use the link below*

<https://east-west-connector-study-2-atqinc.hub.arcgis.com/>

This study is exploring routes to help traffic move into, out of, and across the North Pulaski area. Your input is appreciated

## One New Swing Set, Four New Swings ZERO IMAGINATION



**The New (Old Style) Swing Set at Indianhead Park**

I guess I should be happy the city did follow up on its promise to replace the removed swing set at Indianhead Park. However, I am disappointed that this swing set shows no imagination. There are a variety of modern options available to cities for public park equipment that show creativity.

Many other progressive cities strive to outdo each other in having the coolest playgrounds. Why? Because people drive for miles so their kids can burn a little energy while exercising their imaginations. *If only our city would do that!* I even talked to parks staff before this was purchased about new swing set features like the one below where children and parents can swing together. No such luck! Maybe another generation of kids can get cool parks someday. Hopefully, not in another city. **MJHT**



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