



The Mariemont.com Chronicle: March 2014

Loss of our Voting Rights: A New Ordinance eliminates two elected Mariemont Officials.

The Mayor has unilaterally and with no publicity pushed through an Ordinance that would eliminate two elected officials; the Village Clerk and the Village Treasurer. These positions will be consolidated into a 'fiscal officer' that will be a Mayor's appointee that serves at the pleasure of the Mayor and could reside outside the Village of Mariemont. This eliminates a very important check and balance in Village Government as well as an internal mechanism for audit and the loss of an advisor to Council and the Mayor.

The Mayor has quietly pushed this Ordinance through under the radar of public scrutiny and with approval of a new Council with three new members. The Ordinance was passed at the Council Meeting on February the 10th without discussion. It is remarkable that the Mayor had made no mention of the Ordinance in his December and January Mayor's Bulletins, had not held a Civic Association meeting to discuss the Ordinance, had not aired the Ordinance in the Community Press, had not assigned it to a Council Committee for consideration and, if you listen to the ICRC videos of Council Meetings, you will note that the Ordinance was only mentioned once in passing.

This was the most important piece of legislation to come before Council in many years and its passage gives the Mayor unprecedented powers.

Electric Aggregation - Why haven't the residents of Mariemont reaped the financial benefits?

Since 2001, local governments have been able to form aggregated groups of residents to purchase electric power at discounted rates and those citizens who participate typically save between 10 and 15 percent on their electric bills. In 2012, Mariemont Councilman Cortney Scheeser repeatedly made a recommendation to council to pursue electric aggregation, but his proposals were delayed in committee and removed from the agenda in late 2013.

As a separate transaction, the Mayor and the finance committee chairman met with a broker and signed an agreement to lower electric rates for Village structures, ignoring the opportunity to lower rates for residents and businesses. Indian Hill, Glendale, Amberley Village and Columbia Township are examples where aggregation has saved residents hundreds of thousands of dollars on electric bills.

How much money could Village leaders have saved the residents of Mariemont if they had acted promptly on Councilman Scheeser's recommendation? How much longer will it be before Village leadership takes steps to implement aggregation and by conservative estimates, save the Village's residents and businesses over \$300,000 per year?

"Penny wise and Pound foolish"

Mariemont is a walkable community where residents enjoy many conveniences that other communities do not. One of these is the pickup of recyclables and garbage from the rear of the homes. In

discussing this convenience with two realtors that focus their sales in Mariemont, both indicated that this distinguishing service was a significant selling point for real-estate in the Village and helped to sell our homes at the highest prices in the County or about \$225-\$250 per square foot.

Now the Village officials are considering moving recycling pickup to the curb for a savings of \$17,000 per year according to the Easter Hills Journal article on January 29th. With approximately 1300 household in Mariemont, this figure equates to \$13.07 per year per household. With **convenience** and **ambience** and **real-estate** values in mind, this is the height of “penny wise and pound foolish.” Already we are paying a \$75 per year waste collection fee plus a \$2 dollars sticker fee for each waste container. In 2013, according to the budgetary figures for the Village of Mariemont, these fees and assessments provided approximately \$204,000 to subsidize waste collection, while the Village kicked in about \$80,000 to pay for waste collection from tax revenues.

When municipal budgets are under stress, elected officials tend to cut services and this appears to be the case in this instance. Unfortunately, in many, if not most, communities **curb recycling is only the prelude to curb waste collection.**

With regard to recycling, do we really want our curbs cluttered for over 24 hours per week with a cost savings of 3.6 cents per day per household, not to mention the inconvenience? This special service makes Mariemont special and should be openly discussed. .

Tough Times Ahead for Ohio’s Local Governments

An opinion piece in the Enquirer on January 9th cut to the crux of the financial problems facing local governments in Ohio. Dusty Rhodes, the Hamilton County Auditor, and Greg Harris, a former Cincinnati councilman, provided the insightful commentary. Both agreed that the State of Ohio has a budget surplus at the expense of local governments.

Mr. Rhodes feels that the current State Administration and a compliant Legislature is encouraging local governments to “tighten our belts” with “shared services” and “conservative government.” He goes on to say, however, that the vast majority of local governments are operating conservatively and have already tighten their belts and share services whenever possible.

Mr. Harris contends that in Ohio the operation of local governments is antiquated pointing out that Hamilton County alone has 48 local governments. In 2009, he notes that Hamilton County taxpayers spent \$275 million on 48 fully equipped police departments, some of which cover areas less than 1 square mile. He goes on to say that this overlap of services creates self-defeating jurisdictional issues that are reinforced by the political clout of entrenched power that holds tremendous sway over local elections.

The elimination of estate taxes and certain property taxes will dramatically shrink the revenue streams of all local governments in Ohio. As was pointed out in a November editorial on the Mariemont.com blog, the Village of Mariemont during the past ten years **collected \$3,370,347 in estate taxes and that if there had been no estate tax, the Village would be \$2,054,243 in debt at the end of 2012 rather than having \$1,316,104 in reserves.**

These figures provide a look into the magnitude of the problem. A recent article in the Eastern Hills Journal revealed that recently the Mariemont Council had to approve a \$390,000 appropriation to cover its budgetary shortfall in 2013. These numbers bring into stark focus the squandered opportunity to form a JEDZ with Columbia Township and the need for our leaders to become proactive in producing a balanced budget. Shared and/or reduced services may become the only option other than higher taxes, which in Mariemont are already some of the highest in Hamilton County.

Happy Easter