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PLENTY OF HORNE

Street Closing on Arena Agenda

Murphy makes appointments to WCD board; City to retain naming rights for garage

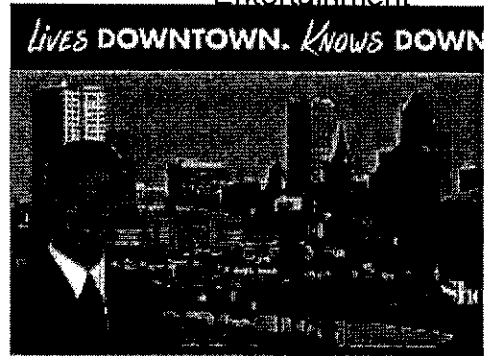
By Michael Horne - Sep 21st, 2015 03:53 pm

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The Common Council meeting Tuesday will pit Ald. **Bob**

Bauman against the **Barrett** administration over plans to close off N. 4th St. for a pedestrian plaza.

Some months ago, Bauman expressed alarm that the proposal for a new Bucks arena would include a plan to close off N. 4th St. for one block between W. Highland and W. Juneau avenues. A permanent closure of the street would not be necessary, he said during an informal discussion held after a meeting of the Historic Third Ward Architectural Review Board.

Bauman was concerned that the closure of the street would provide a "dead zone" downtown, and inhibit movement and development. He suggested that the street be closed only for events, and that it could be configured to do so while serving as a plaza.

For example, he said, the street could be constructed with modified curbs — or, possibly none at all. Removable bollards could define traffic lanes, yet be whisked away when the plaza was in use.

The Bucks and the Barrett administration disagree with Bauman. Bucks president **Peter Feigin** says the facility would hold as many as 200 events during the year, arguing that it is best to simply close the street.

Bauman was able to insert an amendment into the proposed legislation that would keep the street open.

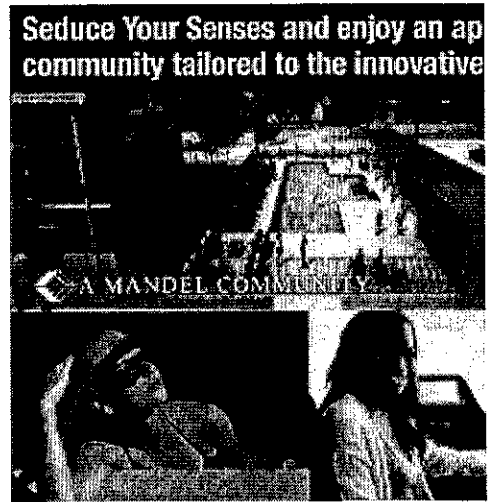
The **Bauman amendment** reads, in part, "Close N. 4th Street as needed using movable bollards under the authority of a special privilege permit (or other device to recognize the Bucks' right to use the street)."

The full Common Council will consider it in the meeting to be held Tuesday, September 22nd. The matter is contained within measures calling for Tax Incremental Funding related to the arena development.

These include \$27 million in borrowing for the Beerline TID #22 to construct an arena parking structure, \$12 million in borrowing for TID #84 [West McKinley and West Juneau] for a plaza associated with the arena, and an additional



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borrowing of \$8 million by TID #84 for the parking structure.

The block closing would retain a transportation easement for construction of a proposed streetcar line. Development Commissioner **Rocky Marcoux** said the benefits of the street vacation would outweigh the disadvantages.

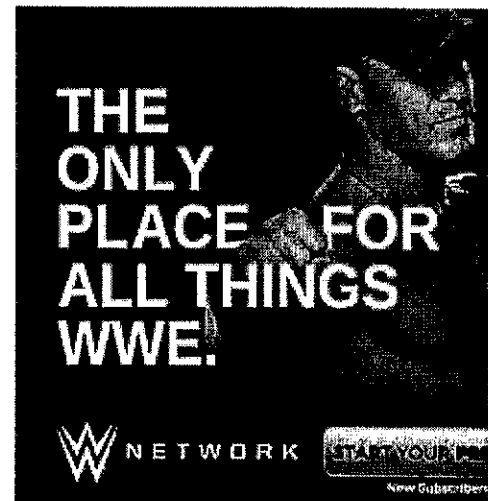
Others disagree. "Vacating Fourth Street for a Bucks plaza would be drastic and risky," said the headline of an open letter published today by a group of citizens, and researched by **Virginia Small** who has been a critic of the arena plan. The letter called on the full council to support Bauman's plan "so that transparent planning and more study can be done around this important civic issue." The group noted that temporary pedestrian plazas are created nightly in New Orleans on Bourbon St., and that they are "commonly done near sports venues in Indianapolis, Seattle and Boston."

Milwaukee routinely closes streets for "festivals, Wisconsin Avenue night markets and Cathedral Square events."

Among the signers was **Julilly Kohler**, a developer and officer with the Turner Hall Ballroom Preservation Trust. Her group has worked for decades to save the 1882 landmark which is located on N. 4th St. just south of W. Highland Ave. She feels that the street closure would create what she also calls "a dead zone," and said that street closures almost inevitably fail. She noted the proposal of Marquette University to close a portion of W. Wisconsin Ave. as an example of a plan that died after public opposition, and hopes the same fate will befall the plan to close N. 4th St.

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She also mentioned the street closure of a portion of E. Buffalo St. between N. Jefferson and N. Jackson streets to accommodate a link between two buildings



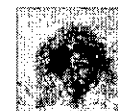
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then operated by Moebius Printing Co. The proposal was approved despite reservations, in order to preserve the jobs at the printer. The company later went out of business, and the connected buildings are now a tomato warehouse. The area of E. Buffalo St. in the vicinity of the building is the only remaining dead zone in the Historic Third Ward, she said.

As for Turner Hall, the old building has benefited from an infusion of capital to rehabilitate its kitchen and bar areas, which are now leased by Major Goolsby's. The building is also handicap accessible and has had fire sprinklers installed throughout. An arrangement with the Pabst and Riverside theaters has enabled the 7,000 square foot Turner Hall Ballroom to become a popular concert venue.

Yet the facility, located directly across the street from the Bradley Center is largely dependent on that arena's schedule to generate business for the bar and restaurant. The operators and Turner Hall board would like to see an increase in street foot traffic, not a decrease, as may happen in the event the block to the north is closed.

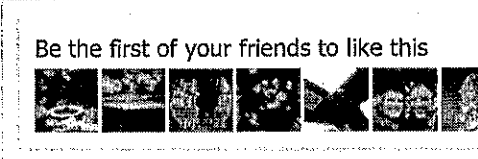
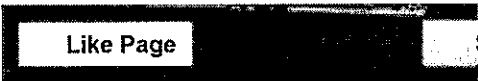
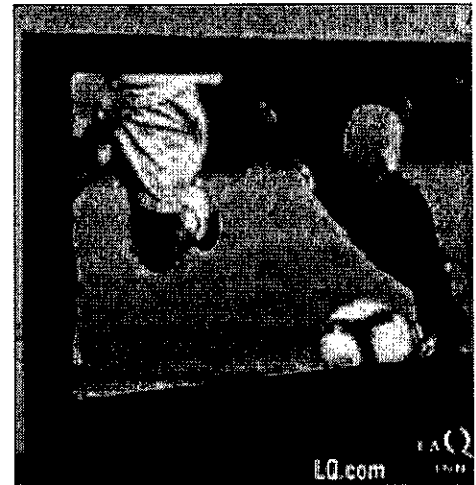
Also, Urban Milwaukee has reported that the west side of downtown, with its larger blocks, already poses difficulties for planners, due to lack of intersections and the creation of "superblocks."

The open letter also expressed concern that the closing of N. 4th St. would hinder efforts to develop the Bronzeville district to the north. For years this area, and N. Martin Luther King Blvd. were blocked off from downtown by an elevated freeway. A street closure, the letter argues, would block a natural path from the Intermodal Transit Station to Bronzeville and MLK Boulevard.

Text of open letter opposing street closure can be found [here](#).

Update

Reached late Monday afternoon at his office, Bauman said his concern was that the city was being asked to "vacate a significant of public infrastructure without a plan." The Bucks have only released very conceptual drawings of the proposed



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arena. These images were brought to the public in April, and nothing new has been made public or private, apparently.

Certainly Bauman has not seen anything new, he has confirmed. "I have seen no new renderings," he said. At the signing of the option to purchase the arena site for \$1 from Milwaukee County on September 9th, Bucks President Peter Feigin said detailed schematics would be available within a "few weeks."

Bauman said the renderings would be essential for the city to make a decision on the vacation of the street. "It is possible it could work well, or be a disaster." Streets, he said, "are part of the fabric of the community. The streets accommodate all kinds of traffic [pedestrian, vehicular, bicycle, transit, emergency]. I want to make sure it is done right, and I can't tell [at this point.] ... Before we plow ahead we should see what is going to happen to this place. The proposal will still have to go through the Zoning Neighborhoods and Development Committee, the Public Works Committee and the City Plan Commission," he said, adding, "The public will have many opportunities to weigh in." Bauman said "hopefully we will hear from architects and planners. Maybe we'll even hear from **John Norquist**."

Bauman admitted that the new arena represents "a very different development process" for the city, what with the state oversight and other factors. He feels there have been some missteps because the development is proposed by "out of towners who do not understand the local custom and process and who are maybe getting some bad advice." He said that President Feigin and his staff "are genuine people who are doing their job and want to see things succeed."

Parking Garage Revenue to be Split Between City and Bucks

In addition to deferring a decision on the street vacation, Bauman said late Monday that he also expects that the Common Council will approve a plan to split the revenues from the naming rights for a parking garage with the Bucks. The Bucks will market the naming rights, in exchange for half the revenue. The city's share of the revenue will go to

Milwaukee Harbor

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support the city's fund for developing and improving its tot lots and play fields. The program is a pet project of council president Michael Murphy, who suggested that the naming rights revenue be dedicated to that purpose, Bauman said.

City to Retain Naming Rights

Eagle-eyed Bauman also seized on the opportunity for the City — and not the Bucks — to retain the revenue from naming rights for the proposed parking structure to be built for the arena.

The amendment reads: "City may sell naming rights or corporate sponsorship signage for the Parking Structure and retain all revenue associated with such naming or sponsorship."

Bauman, Coggs, Murphy on Wisconsin Center District Board — So What?

Common Council President **Michael Murphy** appointed himself, 6th District Alderman **Milele Coggs** and 4th District Alderman Robert J. Bauman as interim members of the Wisconsin Center District Board on September 11th.

In a letter to Secretary **Scott Neitzel**, the State Department of Administration head who is the chair of the WCD board, Murphy also said that he feels there is not sufficient protection in the Bucks contract to penalize the team, and reimburse the taxpayers, in the event that the team relocates, and if the city is stuck with an unused arena and dead pedestrian plaza.

Murphy also strongly cautioned Neitzel to ensure that the bonds to be issued strictly be used for non-commercial portions of the development, so as not to jeopardize the bonds' tax-exempt status.

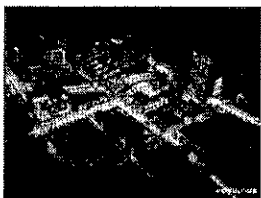
But, to what avail?

Murphy also somewhat plaintively asked that the board be

heard and be able to participate in the districts deliberations with the Bucks, but he did not sound very encouraging:

“While I recognize the State Legislature has bestowed on you, as interim chair, extraordinary power to execute these agreements without the approval of the board, I urge you to consult with, and seek approval from, the board throughout the negotiation process and prior to entering any agreements.”

Arena Renderings



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