

Citizens Hold the Power to Correct the Injustice

By Ford Peterson, November 14, 2010

My name is Ford Peterson. I'm a Meeker County resident by choice—I grew up here. Last September I was asked by some aging and handicapped residents of the Dassel Apartments for help in correcting a horrible injustice. Some are frightened. Some are afraid of the Sheriff's department. They are afraid of the County Commissioners. They are afraid of the County Attorney. After interviewing some of victims and witnesses on my own, I've determined for myself that their fears are not contrived but very real.

This is a long and convoluted story. Instead of doing the right thing, the Commissioners are seeking to bury their past sins at all costs. No reputations or treasures have been spared in the execution of their goal. The lies and abuses continue and get worse instead of better. My pleas with state Offices have only resulted in well meaning 8th grade civics lessons but little in the way of enforcement of laws or justice. The ONLY answer to resolve these problems is public awareness, and the exercise of the people's political power. Removal elections are being considered. Our elected officials should choose to do the right thing for the people they serve. Either do their job, or lose their job.

In 2009, the Meeker County Economic Development Authority (EDA) decided that a take-over of the Meeker County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) was urgent. The need for the urgency is not well understood by outsiders. Only those insiders privy to the details can understand the implications of their failure to take over the HRA. Public descriptions of the urgency make no economic sense. The urgency for the take-over is described in the investigative reports stemming from three formal complaints against the County Commissioners Wilde and Strand. Both Wilde and Strand describe to the investigating officer their true intent, but not their motives. My subsequent attempts at determining the motivation for the take-over strategy has proved to be thwarted. The County Officers are unwilling to reveal their motives, which if understood, I might actually support. They use delay and obstructionist tactics to hide their real goal, which is to increase the property tax levy on Meeker County residents.

It appears that the problems stem from the issuance of over \$5 million in privately placed debt back in 1998 for which the county EDA had no statutory authority to issue. They were not granted authority to do housing by the HRA board back in 1998, as required by 469.004(5) and went ahead with their plans anyway. No reference to even requesting the authority could be noted in the HRA minutes. Even though requested of the EDA, as of today no evidence of the authority has been provided. They claim to have the authority to do housing, but have not provided any evidence that such authority actually exists. Instead they operate housing through a sham 501(c) charity called the Meeker County Development Corp (MCDC)—an off-ledger pseudo county controlled slush fund.

In 1998 they issued the debt, payable by the people of Meeker County, and then spent the \$5 million on land, lumber, cement, roofing, siding, windows, doors, and labor to construct 76 townhomes around the County. All of which was spent under the watchful eyes of the EDA's favorite charity, the Meeker County Development Corporation, a

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section 501(c) charity controlled by the EDA's board and off the County's books. As long as the town homes cash flow, no harm, no foul. With the recent downturn in our economy and cash flow curtailed, instead of doing the right thing and sell the properties, the EDA seeks the authority to levy the good citizens of the County for repairs and maintenance. The HRA can levy for housing. The EDA appears that they cannot. The MCDC absolutely cannot levy tax. Hence, we find all the drama and the urgency. They want to take over the HRA and grant its housing authority to the EDA, merge the MCDC and hang the taxpayers with the repair bills.

In October 2009, the take-over of the HRA board was near complete. The residents of the Dassel Apartments dutifully attended each HRA meeting in hopes somebody cared to help them maintain their homes and make them a more pleasant place to live. Instead they witness character assassinations, and municipal-board-power-play tactics playing out in their living room. In desperation, they sought a voice by writing letters to the editor of the local papers. Only one such letter ever became public. But through her connections at the papers, Wilde saw the letters and the damning nature of their contents.

County Attorney Beckman ordered Commissioners Wilde and Strand over to the apartments on a Friday afternoon, when they knew the HRA office would be closed, to confront the residents and discover who was behind the letters. According to witnesses, Wilde was furious. They both pounded on doors frantically getting the aging and disabled residents of the apartments into the hallways. In the case of two residents, the antics got out-of-hand and resulting in pushing, shoving, and screaming as they interrogated residents as to the source of the letter writing campaign. Strand stood by endorsing Wilde's violent and intimidating demeanor.

The police were called. Statements were taken. An investigation by Wright County was ordered by Beckman. So what's the problem? The problem is, nobody from Wright County chose to interview the victims or the witnesses of the abuse. This was a complete abortion of justice. A Social Services nurse was witness to the event and even claims to have reported it to her supervisor, but resulted in no visible investigation. Wright County never interviewed the nurse either. Yet they consider their investigation to be complete?

Today, we find Strand is the Chairman of the HRA Board and Wilde vowing to keep her seat on the board until the end of her term in July 2012. Although she will no longer be a County Commissioner, her sympathy for the EDA's cause is clear. Only one remaining HRA board member needs to have her character assassinated continually until she quits, and the take-over will be complete. Executive Director Tischer, whose reputation has been needlessly destroyed by these two arrogant Commissioners, has resigned from any further participation in this HRA, effective November 30, 2010. In December, they will likely initiate whatever motions are needed to allow them to levy and assess the good people of Meeker County for the repair and maintenance of 76 crumbling town homes, which we should not even own in the first place. The levy will continue each and every year until the good people of Meeker County demand their Commissioners begin doing the right thing, sell those assets, and repay the debt.

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These residents of the Dassel Apartments need the help of law enforcement to right the wrongs just over a year ago. Although I promised the residents I'd stay involved until this gets resolved, I'm somewhat helpless to further the cause on my own.

And now for the 8th Grade Civics lesson for all of you. Understand this very clearly the next time you vote for a Sheriff, a County Attorney, or a Commissioner. You see, in the State of Minnesota, if the Sheriff is OK with it, and the County Attorney is OK with it, and the Commissioners are OK with it, they can steal, lie, cheat, and assault you, and it's all OK. There are no laws broken when there is no enforcement. No state official will come to your rescue. Unless you lie under oath, it is not a lie. Unless you commit a crime that rises to Federal status, there is no crime.

Although I have no alternative approach to the way Minnesota is currently organized, in this case, what has resulted is sick, and wrong. Innocent people are being abused. Powerful County Officials are abusing their authority by neglecting to enforce the laws and statutes they are sworn to enforce. I encourage each of you to write letters, call these officers. Tell them they need to either do their job, or plan to lose it at the very next opportunity.

Where is the media on this? Where is Jesse Ventura? How about Arne Carlson? Tim Pawlenty needs to weigh in on this. Most importantly, the people with ALL the power in this County are the citizens. Contact Sheriff Miller of Wright County and demand he re-open his incomplete investigation. Write to MN Attorney General Lori Swanson and plead with her to step in. Contact MN State Auditor Rebecca Otto and demand a review. Call or write to Lucia Clausen, the head of HUD in Minneapolis. HUD should weigh in and stop this ridiculous board manipulation nonsense, which has been on-going for almost 2 years! Call Meeker County Sheriff Norlin, County Attorney Beckman, demand they weigh in on these matters by demanding that Wright County do their job completely! Contact the local papers. Attacking me is useless. I am not the problem.

What follows on my blog is largely the work of Lori Musolf of Litchfield, who is owed a debt of gratitude for her efforts. Ms Musolf has a BS in Criminal Justice and been a Volunteer Advocate doing investigative work. She has pulled together the evidence contained in the 224 pages of Wright County's investigative report and outlined in detail many of the short-comings. The report, also available for download as a side bar on the right side of this www.mnpatriots.com blog, is 224 pages of detailed transcript and information. Be patient with the download it's almost 40 MB. The holes in the investigation become apparent after looking at Ms. Musolf's Executive Summary. Ben Smith has been instrumental in pulling together the legal details. My role is what you see—get the word out so the people with the power can understand and demand that their Elected Officials either do their job, or plan to lose their job. It's that simple.