

Alderman Backes Update

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Summer is just around the corner, and there's a whole lot to be excited about here in the city of South Milwaukee. I think that was fully demonstrated in this weekend's wonderful grand opening of Bucyrus Commons.

The Bucyrus Commons project was several years in the making. There's credit to be distributed to a wide variety of people, and I would be remiss if I didn't give a lot of props to Mayor Erik Brooks for his vision in helping to push this thing forward. But in addition, city staff, elected officials, the public here in town, various community organizations, designers, builders and more all deserve a ton of praise for the work they put in to make this thing happen.

As tends to happen with any large city-financed project, I know there were plenty of skeptics. But, as happened with the Bucyrus Club project, I think that skepticism faded away pretty quickly for anyone who was in attendance this weekend.

Simply put, this was a big deal. Our city has really been lacking this kind of community gathering space outside of Grant Park. The energy on Sunday was palpable. It was a huge community turnout, and it was great to see so many familiar faces from local businesses and organizations making their presence felt as well.

People of all ages and backgrounds came out and had a great time at a great event. There was a lot of praise for the physical space itself, as well as the activities. My kids were particular fans of the reptiles from MKE Rainfrog, the free ice cream from the Lions Club, and the ability to go inside several of our emergency vehicles from the fire department. The Whiskeybelles sounded fantastic, and there was an excellent selection of food from local businesses like Bakehouse 23, Azteca, Better Together, Skyline Catering, and Atwood Highway BBQ.

I don't know how anyone could have been there on Sunday and not been excited for the future of that space and our community. It was another reminder that yes, South Milwaukee *can* have nice things, so long as it's willing to make the investment to do so.

Fortunately, there is plenty more investment to come. The money generously donated by the Bucyrus Foundation will continue to have a transformative effect downtown, as well as with the school district (particularly with its athletic facilities).

Because of the city's TID setups and the grant money that is being used to support these types of projects, this improvement is able to occur with minimal impact to the taxpayer, and plenty of long-term benefit. Our staff has done a tremendous job of managing these types of projects, and I think the results speak for themselves.

I turn 35 years old in a few days, and I've lived a majority of my life in South Milwaukee. I don't think at any point in my life up to this point there's ever been nearly as much reason for

excitement and positivity in this city's future as there is right now. It's been great to see us stack some successes and continue to make positive investments in our revitalization.

There are a lot of people who see the potential in our city and are doing great work to help us realize that potential. Let's keep that momentum going. Bucyrus Commons certainly isn't the final step of this journey, but it's certainly an important one well worth celebrating.

Council highlights

This week's council meeting went a bit long (approximately 90 minutes), but that was in large part due to some awards, ceremonies, and reports that were provided to the council.

Every year around this time we celebrate our police and fire departments with award ceremonies at a council meeting. Chiefs Jessup and Litchford did a great job of highlighting some deserving winners who were publicly recognized for their efforts for making our community safer and happier.

Later on in the evening, Chief Jessup provided the police department's annual report (diligently designed and compiled by Officer Rodman, I might add). The highlights: crime is down, clearance rates are strong, and the police department continues to make great partnerships and impacts in our community. I mentioned to the chief that I continue to be impressed not just with the professionalism of our officers, but also their humanity. In my interactions with them I get the sense that they genuinely care about the community and outcomes of their work, which is not something we should take for granted.

Assistant City Administrator Patrick Brever provided an update about the city's strategic plan. The highlights here: the city continues to make every effort to attract buyers for vacancies and to incorporate new locations into the strategic plan. There are several upcoming projects that are exciting, including the residential development at the old Masonic Lodge site and a proposed mixed-use development at 10th and Marquette.

Other highlights:

- We officially welcomed Katie Crosby to her new role as city clerk. Congrats, Katie! It was cool to see her family in attendance for the occasion.
- We voted to update various position descriptions and the requirements for CDL training
- We amended the administrative fee schedule to more accurately reflect a wider variety of circumstances, and also to make at least a couple specific fees cheaper for business owners
- We approved contracts for public works projects on Oak St., Marshall Ave., and Blake Ave.

Quick PAC shoutout

The South Milwaukee Performing Arts Council, of which I am a member, had its annual run/walk fundraiser in Grant Park on Saturday, May 13th, and I thought it went quite well, despite the less-than-ideal weather. Around 80 participants took part in the event, which raised several thousand dollars for performing arts initiatives in town.

The PAC council plays an important role in not just providing guidance for the operations of the PAC itself, but also in community arts outreach. There are a lot of musical events that happen throughout the year that happen in part due to the sponsorship of the PAC and PAC Council, including some of the music that happens at events like the Downtown Market, Heritage Days, and Crusher Fest.

If you're interested in seeing what the Performing Arts Center will have coming to town for its 2023-2024 season, consider stopping by the PAC on the evening of Wednesday, May 31st for a season preview!

That's all for this week! Next time: additional council updates, congratulations to the SMHS Class of 2023, and more.

Enjoy the weather and, for many of you, the upcoming long weekend!

If you have any comments, questions, or concerns, email Alderman Backes at tbackes@smwi.org.