

VIEWPOINT

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Candidate weighs in on AG's opinion

On February 28, 2013, it was initially reported that the City of Elmhurst received a letter from the Illinois Attorney General's Office responding to a Request for Review of actions by the Elmhurst City Council. Since that time, there has been much discussion expressing concerns about the letter and the actions of the City Council. The Request for Review which initiated the response from the Attorney General's Office pertained to meetings held by members of the Elmhurst City Council in which it was alleged that discussions about the development and expansion of the "Addison Street Parking Deck" were held in violation of the Illinois Open Meetings Act.

The letter from the Public Access Counselor for the Attorney General's Office directs the City Council to publically disclose what had previously been discussed about the Addison Street Project in two closed ses-

sion meetings. I am confident that the City Council is seriously considering the Attorney General's letter, and will act appropriately and promptly in response to the directive from the Attorney General's Office.

While there is no suggestion in the Attorney General's letter that the City Council's actions in holding these closed session meetings were purposeful or undertaken for any inappropriate reasons, this incident nonetheless underscores the importance of being ever vigilant in upholding not only the letter of the law of the Illinois Open Meeting Act, but also the spirit of the law.

As a former Assistant Attorney General, former Chair of the State of Illinois Executive Ethics Commission and current director of the Cook County Board of Ethics and Commission on Human Rights, I not only understand in theory the importance of open, transparent and accountable government, I work every day to put the principles of the Illinois Open Meetings Act into practice. However, as with many laudable goals, it is not always as easy to achieve the result as

it should be, but with appropriate guidance, and an understanding and commitment to the principles behind the Open Meetings Act – it is an attainable goal and one worth striving for.

The Illinois Open Meetings Act is designed to make sure that residents have access to their government, and that impactful government decisions be made in an open and transparent manner. Sometimes this requires the balancing of the competing interests of transparency and accountability, with other compelling government interests. Notwithstanding this balancing, the Open Meetings Act favors "sunshine" and good governing demands that public bodies, such as the Elmhurst City Council, act openly wherever and whenever possible, with limited and specific exceptions. I commend Alderman Pezza and the other City Council members who raised questions or concerns about this matter and the way in which it was proceeding. Elected officials are stewards of the taxpayer's trust, and as such, are held to higher standards. As

public servants, City council members have a duty to ensure that residents have access to their government, and that decisions made for them, about them or which affect them, are made in an open and transparent manner. While it is absolutely imperative that elected officials follow the letter of the law, elected officials should also adhere to the spirit of the law. Doing so avoids not only actual improprieties, but also the appearance of impropriety. The Elmhurst City Council

needs to be ever vigilant in protecting the interests of all of the constituents that it serves – the Council must continue to act with integrity and with the best interests of the taxpayers in mind – discussions held in the open, will lead to decisions which will stand strong when evaluated in the light of the day.

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and Aldermanic Candidate
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