

The Use, and Abuse, of Power

Welcome to the club, Ted and Shirley.

It happened about 20 years ago or so. I was serving on the city's Board of Zoning Appeals, and had in fact chaired the Board for 4 or 5 years. My term was ending, and I was up for reappointment. But I wasn't reappointed. I was, like Ted and Shirley, given the axe.

I know it wasn't because I was missing meetings. And I know it wasn't because I was coming to the meetings unprepared. So it must have been because I had angered some Important High Muckamuck, who had complained to some Grand Pooh Bah, who had nixed my reappointment. And that was that.

Now I don't know, or really care to know, who those Important People were. But I thought then, and I think now, that they severely lacked class. Dumping a volunteer because of some petty political beef – well, that pretty much defines the term "small minded". And if it was small minded 20 years ago, when it happened to me, it is just as small minded of you, Paul, to have done it to Shirley and Ted.

Not that this is exactly Paul Esslinger's first foray into petty politics. If you recall, one of my goals as a City Councilor was to reduce the widths of new street constructions. Wider street are more costly, they encourage speeding, they increase storm water runoff (and hence flooding), and they're just plain ugly. They are, unless absolutely justified by traffic demand, a waste of our tax dollars.

Well, a few months after I left the Council, Paul initiated a move to widen the part of Wisconsin Street that I live on. He was on the Traffic Advisory Board at the time, which really has no jurisdiction over street widths whatsoever. But Paul introduced a resolution to widen Wisconsin anyway. Which, after I spoke before the Board, got voted down something like 5 to 1.

So why did Paul propose to widen the street that I live on? Was this to serve the public, to spend our tax dollars to meet a real traffic need the public was crying out for? Was it because, as he claimed at the Board meeting, it's a challenge to drive on Wisconsin from Bent Street to New York? (Try it yourself – you be the judge!) Or was it merely to stick it to me, to avenge some unknown political affront? I'll let you decide for yourself. But in my opinion, it was political pettiness with three capital Ps.

So here's the thing, Paul. The public has given you some influence, entrusted you with a bit of power, a term on the Council with the Title of Mayor. But the public, they're miserly with their power and influence. They'll only hand it out in small dribs and drabs. If you use that influence they give you to serve them well, they'll entrust you with a bit more, in potentially ever larger chunks.

But your actions thus far, calling for Council applications, and canning two dedicated volunteers, have been petty and politically self serving. If the public comes to believe, based upon this pattern, that you're using that power and influence to serve not their needs, but yours; if they discover that you see yourself as more Self Important than you really are; if they find out that you think it's all about you, and not them – well, that's when they pull the plug. And it's you, not Ted or Shirley or me, that gets the axe.

Because frankly Paul, you're just as expendable as Ted and Shirley and me.