

## ***Detroit paper gets it wrong again: Here's the true story behind Ward's***

We are all busy with professional, social and family obligations today. Because of these demands, many people don't have time to carefully study every issue that impacts our community. So, they rely on the media to help with the details.

That's why I'm so outraged at the wrong information recently printed in the Detroit Free Press about Dearborn's purchase of the former Montgomery Ward's. Their coverage is presented as if it is trustworthy, but instead, it is completely irresponsible reporting.

It is one thing if the Free Press writers and editors disagree with me and the City Council members who voted for the purchase. We could have a reasonable discussion about why it was so important for the City to take action when the private sector failed to come up with a project worthy of this historic district. But instead, the Free Press has misled people by ignoring critical facts and then making despicable implications based on sloppy reporting.

To make matters worse, this is the second time this reporter and these editors have taken such a low road, which makes me believe they are deliberately attacking me and Dearborn.

I'm appalled that the Free Press would state that the federal government should investigate the Ward's transaction. The Free Press produces no factual

evidence to support the call for a federal investigation. It is an insult to me and in complete contrast to my long career as a public servant.

I've focused my career on protecting and promoting Dearborn, so worse than the smear on my reputation is the potential damage these unsubstantiated allegations can have on my hometown. And I won't tolerate that.

So, one more time, let me set the record straight about the Ward's transaction:

- We conducted the purchase in a public forum, with continual press coverage and public discussion.
- We followed our regular purchasing policies, which require independent property appraisals to determine the worth of any property that we pursue. In the end, we paid less for Ward's than what the two independent appraisals had set the value at.
- We negotiated for more than a year before agreeing to a price. The price we paid was \$700,000 less than the sellers consistently demanded.
- We completed our purchase by the rules of the Dearborn City Charter. Under the Charter, the mayor cannot buy or sell property. Only the City Council authorizes sales and purchases. In this case, the purchase was approved in a 5-1 vote during a public meeting.

Other important information for Dearborn taxpayers to note:

- The City purchased title insurance before acquiring the Ward's site. The policy guarantees that the City will be reimbursed for the

purchase price under any circumstance impacting the title of the property.

- This insurance would cover us even in the unlikely event that a highly-publicized, but unrelated, legal case against Talal Chahine impacts the Ward's property.
- I need to emphasize that the City purchased Ward's from a corporation, and not from Mr. Chahine personally. Mr. Chahine was one of the people who held an interest in the corporation.
- It is also important to note that the city started negotiating for the Ward's property long before Mr. Chahine's legal troubles with the federal government were known.
- Before the City purchased Ward's, there was no recorded notice tied to the property that would have alerted the City or our title company to any possibility that the federal government might have an interest in the Ward's property. To imply that the information was readily available to any potential purchaser exercising due diligence is simply not true.
- And, the federal government has not filed a lien against the property, nor have prosecutors threatened to seize it, as the Free Press reported.
- The Free Press emphasizes that Mr. Chahine is my political supporter. Like hundreds of other people, including many Dearborn business owners, Mr. Chahine has donated to my campaigns.

Those donations have followed the laws governing political contributions which strictly limit the amount individuals can contribute in a four-year campaign cycle.

As far as the proposal from Burton-Katzman company to develop the site:

- Although the City believes the company has made strong contributions to our west downtown, we have not yet accepted its proposal for the Ward's site. Therefore, it is wrong to speculate about what the City will ultimately achieve from the purchase and control of the Ward's site, based on one proposal still under review.
- The City's motivation for buying property is rarely immediate financial gain. Instead, we invest in our community to spur additional development and interest. We look to create catalysts for long term growth.
- Our track record is excellent in our downtown redevelopment efforts. West Village, West Village Commons and Georgetown Commons illustrate this. For every one dollar of investment the City has put into these projects, we've seen at least two dollars added from the private sector.

Despite all their mistakes and malice, the Free Press did quote me correctly when I said I won't allow the Ward's site "to rot on my watch." I remain steadfast about the City's decision. We will be able to direct the

scope and the content of the development in that critical corner of Michigan and Schaefer.

Whatever the Free Press' motivation, I won't let this irresponsible journalism derail what is right and best for Dearborn.

With patience and savvy, we will end up with something that will bring more people into this district now and bolster the area for decades to come.

And, from the beginning, that has been the only motivation for the Ward's purchase.