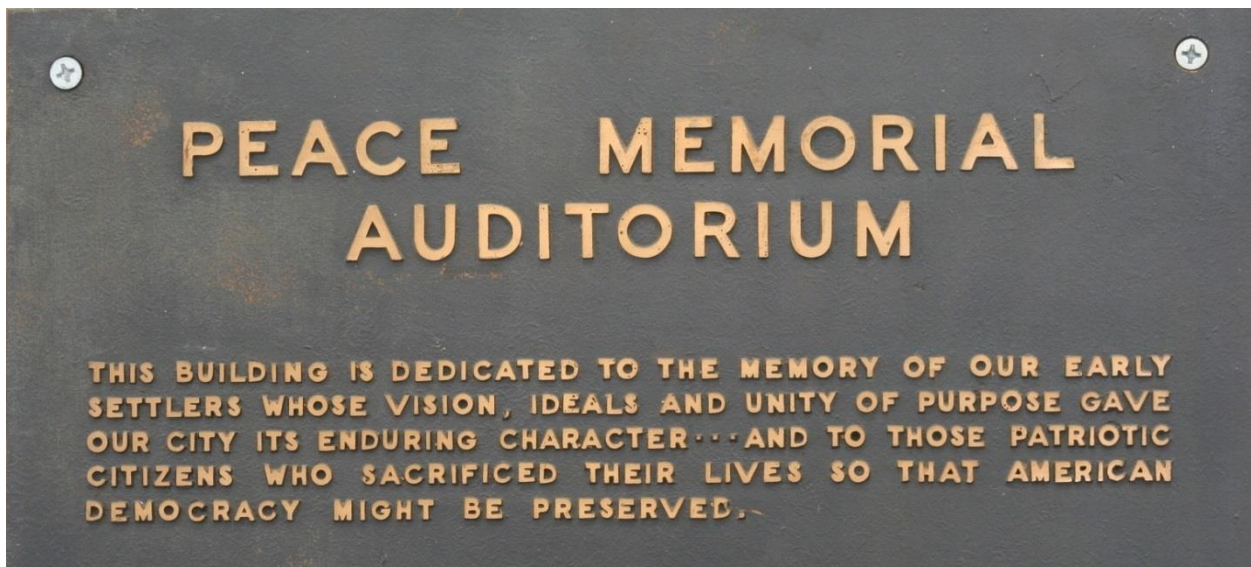




## Thoughts ..... Propaganda Wins – Parks and Recreation Staff and Taxpayers Lose

The first Commission meeting for September 2013 confirmed some of my earlier thoughts on the direction of the Commission. The Auditorium Renovation project failed on a 3-2 vote. The current commission is as liberal as any that we had in the past. They will drive up the city debt and cater to special interest groups. The vote on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, was a victory for the “artsy folks” and the special interest groups. The big losers were the people that work in Parks and Recreation (sentenced to a year or more to continued work in a 30 year old garage) and the tax payers (get ready for more city debt).

Leading the charge to raise the city debt was the Historic Preservation *Advocacy* Board. I use the term advocacy because they are clearly not an advisory board. The city has a list of advisory boards but a number of them need a title change to advocacy, because they are not about providing advice, but more about generating propaganda on various topics. Folks on this advocacy board worked hard to perpetuate the lie that the Peace Memorial Auditorium was a World War II Memorial, that the stage was the heart of the memorial and that the stage was needed. They did not bother to confuse the issue with facts. You think some of them would have just read the plaque or maybe looked at usage data. The group also took no interest in the fiscal aspects of the project, as money or cost is apparently not a concern.



The auditorium project in a nut shell was an excellent piece of sound fiscal management. It combined two CIP projects, auditorium renovation and new Parks and Recreation Offices. The result was that both projects could be completed without requiring increased taxes or new city bonds. The project would have reduced staff in parks and recreation, increased customer service and provide more gym space for the public. The stage (little used) would have been removed as part of the renovation in favor of an

additional basketball court. Data indicates that basketball court usage is significantly higher than stage usage – 14,000 or so users last year for basketball but only 200 or so for the stage. Portable stage facilities would still have been part of the project. The project passed twice on 4-1 votes and city money was spent on redesign efforts.

Most of the newly elected commission lack fortitude and courage. 40 or so people showed up at the commission meeting wearing propaganda stickers (Save the World War II Peace Memorial Auditorium), and spreading false information about cost and usage. Eleven or so spoke during the public comment portion of the meeting. Two of the speakers were not Manhattan Residents. The propaganda effort swayed the vote of the two *Waffle Party* members of the Commission Usha Reddi and Rich Jankovich. Unable to face a direct challenge they changed their two time vote for the project to a vote to study it some more. Commissioner McCulloh was at least consistent in her *Robin Hood Party* goal of spending as much city money as possible. She continued to support the effort to kill the renovation in the hope that a bigger grander project could be created to appease the artsy folks and raise city debt - so “we can be more like California.” But, when it comes to taking care of the workers, a garage is good enough for them. The Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem stayed the course and attempted to take care of the Parks and Rec Staff and stay under budget.

What does the vote mean? It means that the Parks and Recreation Staff are valued far less than special interest groups. It means that cost, consolidation, and better customer service is not valued. The 3-2 vote ensured at least a year delay in completion. It took nine years to get the original building project completed - 1946 - 1955. With a little luck the commission can drag it out through the next election. They might even consider making it a November 2014 ballot initiative; let the voters determine if the auditorium should be renovated or not. If the commission does finally determine what to do, they might just go full circle back to the idea that was voted down, or more likely toss an additional three or so more million dollars at the project and add to the already huge city debt. The vote means that the taxpayer lost.

It takes three votes to accomplish anything and the jury is no longer out on the direction of the current commission. If you want to get some money tossed in the direction of your special interest group, simply put an ad in the paper, make a few buttons, show up at the Commission Meeting and speak a few lines of truth or not. The end result will be full support of your project by Commissioners Jankovich and Reddi. Put any kind of artsy, for the kids, historical or social services spin on your presentation and you get the third vote – a resounding yes from the progressive/fiscal conservative Karen McCulloh.

I am going to get my group together and make some Mr. K buttons. If I can get a few folks to dress up in costume and present to the commission - a renovated historic statue with some artsy flairs will be in the works.

Mr. K.

