

# Village of Fox River Grove

## Board Report 4-21-26

I attended Tuesday's Village Board meeting expecting to provide here an update on the Block B development proposal, but instead I was able to witness a trustee getting slammed by an old timer for daring to take a closer look at how the Village is doing business.

Block B? It should come as no surprise that the Block B proposal will be approved by the Village Board – likely at its next meeting. The only comments at the meeting from trustees spoke effusively about how great everything is going to be. The Village Board will likely vote on Block B at its Tuesday, May 5 meeting at 6:30 p.m.

Before the Block B presentation, Trustee David Joseph gave a trustee's report to the Village Board. Joseph was elected in 2025. He owns and operates Bruneau's, a great coffee shop in the Fox River Grove train station. In a previous position, Joseph conducted audits of governmental bodies. When Joseph came onto the Village Board, he spent a year doing an assessment of village governance and administration in Fox River Grove. He met with and shadowed staff within various departments. He reviewed our building permit and review process. He did his best to get the bottom of how much money the village has sunk into the failed development at 401 Algonquin and how much more money it will take to get that site ready for development again.

I want to highlight Trustee Steven Knar's response to Joseph's findings. I want to get through Knar's talking down first so we can focus on the excellent points brought up in Joseph's recommendations.

After Joseph presented his findings, Trustee Steve Knar adopted a tone of condescension and scorn as he rebuked Joseph for stepping out of line. Knar told Joseph that he needs more than a year on the board to understand how this village works. He reminded Joseph that he has 20 years of experience on the Board.

Knar told Joseph that the Board works in harmony together, and even when a vote is 4-2 on an issue, the minority votes get in line with the other trustees because they are a part of one governing body and they are unified in the final decisions.

As a person who has studied politics and government since I was in high school in the 1980s, I can honestly say I was surprised by Knar's take on how a democratic form of government should operate in a free society. He appears to prefer a governmental body where newcomers do not ask questions and seek answers. He would rather, it seems, have newcomers sit quietly and do as their elders on the board do.

When I was a village trustee 25 years ago, I also faced the overwhelming reality of a Village Board and Village President who liked to follow the good old boy legacy that has marred government in this town probably since its founding. Do as we do. Say what we say. Don't do anything that might shake up how we have always and want to always do business in Fox River Grove.

Knar carries the good old boy flag proudly. Knar was particularly miffed that Joseph took 10 minutes of the Board's time with the findings from his year of research and investigation. The only other item on the agenda was the Block B proposal.

Here are the findings Joseph asked the Board to consider:

1. **401 Algonquin.** Fox River Grove deserves a full accounting of how much the Village has spent in the course of approving and then demolishing the failed apartment complex at 401 Algonquin, as well as an accounting for what additional costs need to be incurred in order to acquire the site via eminent domain and try to package it to a new developer (like we just did with the team Harlem-Irving Companies has put together). The village is expected to lose money on this transaction, and Joseph wants to understand how much as well as the risks associated with the plan. He did not get enough information from the Village administrator and trustees to complete that assessment himself – and he is a trustee with access to executive sessions and village communications that most of us do not see. We all have a right to this full accounting.
2. **10-year plan.** He called for the Village to prepare a 10-year development plan as it moves forward with plans to revitalize our struggling commercial district. Having a clear vision and strategy to overcome the obstacles we have before us is smart government and even smarter planning.
3. **Fox River Grove fire department.** Joseph called on the Village to repair bad relations with the Fox River Grove fire department. It did not appear to the public that the Village Board fully included the fire department in planning around and evaluating the impact of the 401 Algonquin development that failed. It is unclear how involved the fire department was in the Block B conversations, but it already looks like the fire department will be unable to pull in on the north side of the building to battle any emergencies that might take place at the building. The developer plans to eliminate the Crawford Alley exit onto Illinois, creating a dead end the fire department will not be able to navigate with its big trucks.
4. **Codes and Laws.** In communications with the trustees, Joseph asked that the Village Administrator cite relevant codes and laws regarding issues that are being discussed. Giving trustees more information they need to make responsible decisions does not seem like a big ask of our government.
5. **Human resources professional.** Joseph urged the Village to hire a part-time human resources professional to manage HR functions in an objective manner that does not present conflicts of interest. Joseph's assessment of staff is that 52% of the village's workforce are approaching retirement age in the next six years. He is concerned that there is no succession plan in place to prepare for a smooth transition when those retirements occur. He is also concerned about the lack of women in leadership positions hired to work for the village. Finally, he reported on a misogynistic comment that Village Administrator made in front of staff in village hall. He has concerns that the village lacks a trained and experienced HR professional to provide oversight and guidance in a way that does not put the Village at greater risk.
6. Joseph encouraged the Village to hire a part-time building inspector that is not the same consultant (B&F Construction) that also does plan reviews for the Village. There is a lack of checks and balances in the current model.
7. Joseph asked that Village Board meeting agendas be sent to trustees 7 days in advance of meetings so trustees have a reasonable amount of time to prepare for the meetings.

That's it. Steve Knar is the only trustee who commented after Joseph's report.

Joseph has a background in government audits. When he was elected to the Board, he had questions. Tapping into his own expertise as an auditor, he looked for the information to lead to answers. He said he takes his responsibility as an elected village trustee seriously.

In Joseph's defense, he knew from the cold reception he continues to receive from trustees that asking for any of these items to be on the Board agenda would be a hurdle he could not overcome on his own. So he presented a trustee's report, an option listed on village board meeting agendas along with the president's report, to release his findings and recommendations.

Good government is about doing things as efficiently and effectively as possible, with transparency and accountability to the people. In ways that do not present conflicts of interest or put the village at unnecessary risk. I am grateful to have a trustee like David Joseph working for me to make government in Fox River Grove better. Not the same old-same old we have been consuming for decades.