

CLOSE WINDOW



Friday, November 21, 2008

Print Version

Print Page

Last modified: Thursday, November 13, 2008 8:13 AM EST

Council allowed public into the process

Some folks say government doesn't listen, that elected officials just do what they please, or what their political party wants of them.

At times we have agreed with that sentiment. We have seen it from the town council level to the Congress. We have seen it in county government and we have seen it in state government.

At Wednesday's Steuben County Council meeting, we saw the political process at its best, or at least as good as it gets in our form of government. It wasn't true Democracy, but it got to the core where government listens to the people, even if you don't necessarily agree with the outcome.

The council voted to enact a local option income tax. This came after the process was opened up to one public hearing beyond what was required by law. This came after much input was allowed by the public even though there's nothing in Indiana law that requires governmental bodies to take input from the public. Yes, folks, the county council could have debated the LOIT it passed on final reading Wednesday without one word from the audience.

The same was true of a vote taken on a measure that would have funded a study on the possible formation of a southern Steuben sewer district. There's nothing that raises the ire of the public any greater than sewers, sewer rates and in Steuben County, sewer districts. Every sewer district that has been formed in our county, and there's more than the Steuben Lakes Regional Waste District out there, has gone through the same sort of spirited debate as has been exercised with the potential southern district.

Again, the council could have just debated among themselves. Similar views to much of what was brought out by the public no doubt would have been voiced by council members eventually. Instead, the people got to speak on a relatively miniscule funding request, \$3,300 for the local match for a \$33,000 sewer study.

With both measures, there were people who agreed with the council's decision and there were those who disagreed. It might be safe to say there were more people against the tax that was approved and more people against the sewer funding that was not approved.

The bottom line was that the council, at the insistence of its president, Bill Booth, opened up the meeting to public comment. The meeting held in late October to let people come out to speak to the council about the tax was at the insistence of Councilman Paul Sparks, and it took consensus from all council members to bring this about.

If you think government doesn't listen, think again.

The Steuben County Council gets an A for allowing public input. There are some governmental units in our community that would not have acted in the same fashion and there are others that are just as open to public input. We feel what the council has done, process wise, can serve as a good civics lesson, a how-to on treating your constituents.

-- CLOSE WINDOW --