

A Better Mount Pleasant

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PRIVATE MEETINGS AND OPEN BARS

“Quorums of Mt. Pleasant, Caledonia and Sturtevant meet for “Government 101” meeting on private property after kicking public out.”

MT. PLEASANT, WI June 26, 2018 - On June 21, 2018, legal quorums of the village boards of Mt. Pleasant, Caledonia and Sturtevant convened at the historic (and private) Wingspread compound for a meeting titled “Government 101” sponsored by the League of Wisconsin Municipalities (LWM) and the Johnson Foundation. The trustees were accompanied by various professional staff including village clerks and administrators.

The Village of Mt. Pleasant posted a notice of this event on [the village website](#) on June 14, 2018, which stated “a majority of the Village Board may assemble to gather information about an item over which they may have decision-making responsibility.”

Kelly Gallaher, spokesperson for A Better Mt. Pleasant, attempted to attend this meeting and was asked to leave a short time later by Wingspread staff, LWM counsel Daniel Olson, and Mt. Pleasant Village Administrator, Maureen Murphy.

“Upon arriving at Wingspread, I was directed to the building where the meeting was to take place. Because of the rain, I was allowed to walk through the Wingspread house as a shortcut,” Gallaher says. “A reception area was set up with an open bar and bartender. My guide informed me the bar and reception was for the participants after the meeting ended.”

Gallaher continued, “I entered the meeting area, took a seat, and set up my iPhone and began to broadcast live on Facebook. A few moments later, a woman from Wingspread approached me and asked if I was Kelly. I said yes, and she led me to an office. She told me I had to leave because the meeting was private, on private property and I had not been invited to attend.”

“I stated this was a meeting of public officials, clearly meeting in their official capacity and while I understood I was on private property, accommodations must be made to allow the public to observe.”

Gallaher reported the woman left and she again took her seat. A few minutes later, a man Gallaher recognized as Daniel Olson, Assistant Legal Counsel for the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, approached and asked to speak to her.

“Mr. Olson said the event was not a meeting, but an educational session and was not subject to open meetings law,” Gallaher says. “I told Mr. Olson, the meeting had been noticed by the village and a quorum of trustees were present. He said the notice was a courtesy, and asked me to leave immediately.”

Feeling that Wingspread officials and Mr. Olson were willing and prepared to call security to have her removed, Gallaher left the premises. “Upon returning to my car, I observed a Wingspread security guard checking to make sure I was leaving.”

Government 101

Ironically, in the packet of materials provided by the League of Wisconsin Municipalities to the “Government 101” participants include bullet points which read:

Open Meetings Law

- Representative government dependent upon informed electorate.
- Public entitled to fullest, most complete information regarding affairs of government.
- Law shall be liberally construed to achieve its purposes.

All meetings of governmental bodies must be:

- preceded by public notice
- publicly held in places reasonably accessible to public
- open to all citizens at all times unless otherwise expressly provided by law

2-part test to determine if open meeting law is triggered

1. Purpose - the gathering must be for purpose of engaging in governmental business (i.e., discussion, decision or information gathering).
2. Number - number of members present must be sufficient to determine the parent body’s course of action regarding the subject matter discussed.

In early May, the Village of Mt. Pleasant scheduled a “Government 101” meeting to take place at Village Hall facilitated by the League of Wisconsin Municipalities. After A Better Mt. Pleasant announced on its Facebook page it was excited to attend and would be broadcasting it live two days before the meeting was to take place, the village abruptly cancelled it the night before.

“It seems abundantly clear that Mt. Pleasant village officials did not appreciate our desire to document their meeting with the LWM and because they could not legally exclude us at Village Hall, they cancelled the meeting and moved it to a private location.”

A Better Mt. Pleasant is currently reviewing steps to file a multi-jurisdictional complaint against Mt. Pleasant, Caledonia and Sturtevant for violations of the Wisconsin Open Meetings law.

This incident was preceded just the day before by a cancellation of the Village of Mt. Pleasant Community Development Authority (CDA) meeting when Gallaher notified them their meeting had been improperly noticed and any actions taken could be subject to legal challenge and invalidated.

The Mt. Pleasant CDA is also the subject of a request for review filed by State Representative Peter Barca on May 30, 2018, with the Wisconsin Attorney General for actions on two occasions to censor residents living in the Foxconn area from speaking about agenda items during public comments.

“The behavior of Mt. Pleasant village officials would be comically inept if the people of Wisconsin weren’t counting on them to oversee the largest, most expensive development project in the U.S.,” says Gallaher. “The people of Mt. Pleasant deserve much more from their elected officials than this.”

A Better Mt. Pleasant is a nonpartisan, community organization dedicated to advancing a fair, accountable and transparent local government in Mount Pleasant, Wisconsin.

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