

A Better Mount Pleasant

For Immediate Release

Contact: Kelly Gallaher

414/350-6858

abettermtpleasant@gmail.com

PODCAST SHINES LIGHT ON MOUNT PLEASANT'S RUSH TO WIN FOXCONN DEAL

"Village sacrificed due diligence and public input to claim once in a lifetime development."

MOUNT PLEASANT, WI DECEMBER 9, 2018 - An hour-long podcast from Gimlet Media's popular "Reply All" show has focused its attention on the Village of Mount Pleasant, future home of Foxconn's \$10 billion LCD factory. Through recorded interviews with Village officials, financial experts and local residents, combined with archived audio recordings of Village meetings, the episode titled "Negative Mount Pleasant" tells the story of Mount Pleasant's secretive race to secure the most expensive corporate development project in American history.

Reply All reporter and interviewer Sruthi Pinnamaneni and program producer Jessica Yung traveled to Wisconsin in October and spent nearly a week in Mount Pleasant interviewing Village President David DeGroot and residents Al Gardner, Sean McFarlane and Kelly Gallaher, who were featured in the broadcast.

The program also features interviews with University of Iowa economist David Swenson, Wall Street analyst Alberto Moel, municipal financial advisor Todd Taves, and investigative journalist Larry Taback.

"Negative Mount Pleasant" begins by highlighting the somewhat contentious political environment found in pre-Foxconn Mount Pleasant, with then candidate for Village President David DeGroot's public accusation that his opponent and Gallaher had instigated the egging of his house. Weeks later, leading up to the Foxconn announcement in Mount Pleasant, newly elected Village President DeGroot is censured by the Village Board after he threatens to have resident Al Gardner and Trustee Jon Hansen forcibly removed by police during a Village board meeting and refuses to allow Gallaher to ever speak again until she first submits a written and oral apology to him.

These dramatic recordings serve as the podcast's foundation for how this part-time Village Board and President will interact with residents once the Foxconn factory location is announced in October 2017.

"This is not a village where the voices of residents have ever really been appreciated or respected," says Kelly Gallaher, spokesperson for the grassroots organization, A Better Mt. Pleasant. "Once Foxconn came, the concerns, demands and anger of residents fell on the deaf ears of a Village President who didn't believe he had any obligation to tell us what agreements he was signing. It was all done behind closed doors."

The public was not allowed to read the development agreement between Mount Pleasant and Foxconn until it was approved by the Village Board in late November 2017, and Trustees who met in closed session negotiation meetings were prohibited from discussing the details with residents.

While the controversial state incentive package offered to Foxconn has come under intense scrutiny since it was announced, to a lesser extent, the financial incentive package offered by Racine County and Mount Pleasant is understood.

Pinnamaneni's interview with economist Swenson reveals his view that the village is "betting the future of the town with money they don't have, assuming technology that they don't understand and benefits that are going to be distributed widely but not necessarily in their community. That's a fool's bet."

By contrast, in the interview with David DeGroot, the Village President offers a childlike exuberance for the deal, offering little understanding of the impact on residents or potential financial implications.

Regarding his local delegation trip to Osaka, Japan, DeGroot says, "I've seen the future, and it's coming to Mount Pleasant." DeGroot describes the Japanese factory by saying, "It was big. It was massive. There's, there's robots that are absolutely ginormous."

Gallaher is unimpressed. "Our village is on the hook for hundreds of millions of dollars that won't generate revenue for decades - if everything goes well. Foxconn brings a host of possibilities for the region, but the financial future of our village is tied to Foxconn's success, and we are tied to its failure. That risk deserved some thought and due diligence."

The podcast ends with the voices of Village residents protesting the use of blight and eminent domain actions by the Village to clear the 3,000 square acres of land Foxconn requires. The most poignant moment provided by resident Sean McFarlane, a handicapped father of four who willingly moved into a temporary house for the Village, only to find it dirty and unsuitable to his wheelchair mobility needs. Days after moving in, Village contractors withdrew McFarlane's

promised relocation benefit package, leaving him fearful of becoming homeless and tearfully pleading for help from silent Trustees.

On the podcast episode, Gallaher concludes. "What this podcast did best was to use our own words to tell the real story. Residents deserve more than talking points written by media consultants, and that's all Village leaders have offered us - when they've been willing to speak to us at all. They have forgotten who they serve."

On the popularity of the show which is downloaded on average 5 million times each month.

"We've been getting messages and emails from all over the country. The podcast has clearly struck a chord with people. I think that's because listeners realize what has happened in Mount Pleasant can happen in their community too."

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

Reply All is a weekly podcast about the internet from Gimlet Media, hosted by PJ Vogt and Alex Goldman. Episode #132 Negative Mount Pleasant [LINK](#)

A follow-up interview with Reply All reporter and interviewer Sruthi Pinnamaneni about the making of the podcast has been published at The Verge. [LINK](#)