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## Hall of shame: Commissioner Fink sets poor example for planning commission

We're not aware of a Politicians' Hall of Shame, but if such a thing did exist, we'd have to nominate St. Louis County Commissioner Dennis Fink for his shameless performance at last Friday's meeting of the county's planning commission.

The issue before the commission couldn't have been more clear cut. The county planning department was recommending denial of US Steel's proposed Three Bays plat because it contained more lots than allowed under applicable ordinances. US Steel argued otherwise, suggesting that lakeshore should be measured as it meanders, not in the straight-line fashion that the county has long used. Doing so would make it possible for US Steel to claim a few more lakeshore lots than the ordinance would otherwise allow.

St. Louis County's method of calculating lake frontage is not only longstanding practice here— it's the way other counties do it as well. It's also how counties measure lake frontage for valuation purposes.

Accepting US Steel's argument would have overturned decades of precedent and opened up the county to a potentially potent lawsuit from the organization, Sensible Advocates for the Vermilion Environment, or SAVE, whose attorneys have kept close tabs on the Three Bays proposal. While US Steel could litigate the issue as well, the words of the planning department's own attorney were instructive. As he put it to members of the planning commission, he'd rather defend the county for following longstanding practice, than have to explain why it suddenly deviated from its own rules.

That advice seemed pretty persuasive to most members of the planning commission, but precedent, logic, and the best interests of the county didn't have much influence with Mr. Fink. After hearing from the planning department, several citizens, SAVE's attorney, and the Township of Breitung, all of whom opposed approval of US Steel's project as proposed, Mr. Fink promptly made a motion to give US Steel everything it wanted. It was positively jaw-dropping.

Fortunately for the county, less beholden heads prevailed and the planning commission rejected Fink's motion. Later, when it became clear that the commission was set to approve a plat that actually complied with the county's ordinance, Fink picked up his things and walked out of the meeting. Kind of like the kid who tosses the Monopoly board after landing on his opponent's Park Place.

It's pretty clear who Fink was there to represent, and it sure as heck wasn't St. Louis County. Indeed, St. Louis County's planning and zoning process would have been thrown into chaos had the commission actually bought Fink's twisted logic.

We can't fault US Steel for making their case, weak though it is. The company has been aggressive in pursuing its interests and that's their right. In the end, they've made a number of concessions that would make this a much better development, should it become reality. One more step, and the company will have a proposal of which they can be proud.

Residents of St. Louis County can't say the same of their commissioner. While we expect US Steel to pursue




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its own interests, we also expect that the commissioners we elect will do their utmost to protect the public interest. In this case, Fink appeared as little more than a tool of a big corporation. He didn't seem to care about the larger ramifications.

It was an embarrassing display. One worthy of anyone's hall of shame.

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