



THE GALENA GAZETTE

Home of President & Civil War Hero General Ulysses S. Grant



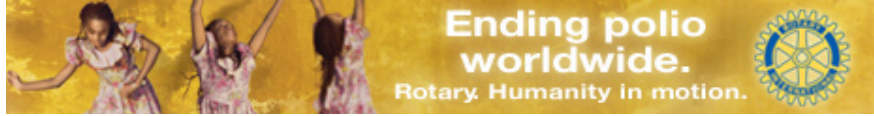
Weather for Galena



Overcast
Time: 9:00 am
Temp: 37
RealFeel Temp.® 25
Humidity: 86
Winds: NW at 15 mph

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Home Rule nixed

GALENA — Galena Mayor Dick Auman announced on July 30 that he has removed the Home Rule question from the Monday, Aug. 9 Galena City Council meeting agenda. In a statement delivered to the Gazette on July 30, the mayor explained his reasons for his action.

He said he is taking this action because he believes there isn't enough time between now and the November election for the city council and the citizens of Galena to explore fully the merits of the city taking on Home Rule powers. He believes that some understanding of the history of Home Rule is required to understand the decision.

Home Rule powers in Illinois were created in 1970, with the adoption of a new state constitution, he said. Under Home Rule, municipal and county governments can exercise any local powers not denied to them by the state. Non-Home Rule communities can exercise only those powers expressly assigned to the community by the state.

In effect, he says, Home Rule places more power in local government units than non-Home Rule units enjoy.

In 1976, the citizens of Galena rejected Home Rule by a ratio of nearly ten to one. In the 25-plus years since the question was on the ballot in Galena, Home Rule has been discussed from time to time and has been a campaign issue for candidates for city council on occasion.

In the fall of 2003, a Galena citizen, interested in shifting some of the burden of paying down the debt on the new \$14 million wastewater treatment plant from sewer rates to some other source of revenue, came before the city council and announced that he was undertaking a petition drive to get the question of Home Rule on the ballot for consideration by the citizens of Galena. In response to that citizen initiative, Auman said he appointed a committee to study Home Rule, so that members of the council could learn more about Home Rule powers. The committee began work in late fall and reported to the council on Feb. 16, 2004.

On July 19, 2004, the council held a special meeting to discuss infrastructure projects in conjunction with Home Rule powers that might be used to fund those infrastructure needs.

The focus of discussion was almost exclusively on Home Rule, and little attention was paid to the infrastructure needs outlined at the beginning of the meeting, the mayor commented.

The mayor said he believes the focus of the discussion should be more appropriately on the infrastructure needs of the community. Home Rule, he says, is only a tool; it could be part of a solution to the community's needs. The problem is our far too long neglected streets and sidewalks and our lack of an adequate storm water collection system. That's the problem, Auman says.

He believes the citizens of Galena have to understand the problem before they will be





willing to adopt a solution, and he wants to take the time to properly define the problems we face and the potential cost of fixing them before citizens are asked to consider how our infrastructure problems can be addressed effectively.

The question of giving local government more power can be a deeply divisive question, Auman states, and he believes there is no point in risking dividing the community over the Home Rule issue if there is no interest in addressing the problems Home Rule could help solve. He cited some examples. The city has miles of streets, many with no curb or gutter and no storm water sewers beneath them. Sidewalks all over the city are in disrepair or non-existent. Many streets are higher than the sidewalks, which makes the problem of runoff even worse.

"Addressing these problems has been deferred for decades," the mayor stated. "The citizens of Galena have to decide if they want to fix these problems. Once that decision is made, we can discuss how to pay for fixing them. Home Rule should be a part of that discussion."

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