

It's not the city council fighting the state, feds

By NORMAN PAPPOUS | Posted: Thursday, July 25, 2013 12:00 am

Once again Galveston's public policy is being crafted behind closed doors among unelected individuals — and it appears that until they get what they want, Galveston's infrastructure money is staying in Austin.

I read that Heber Taylor (“They’re already talking about the next election,” The Daily News, July 21) believes the city council should stop fighting the state and the feds over public housing. I guess I have missed some meetings! You see, for the last year, I lost every vote, save one, regarding the conciliation agreement. The sole motion I won was to retain an expert who could tell us if the approved plans were compliant with the Federal Fair Housing Act.

So, have we been fighting the state and the feds? The mayor asked the developer's representative in open session (on video) what the city of Galveston has done to delay their public housing development efforts. Their reply? “Nothing.”

Nothing? How could that be?

The Daily News editorial stated the city council should stop fighting the state and the feds over public housing. Maybe Taylor is not basing his belief on the city council's voting record but on the fact that the General Land Office has suspended Galveston's Round 2 infrastructure funding. That could be an understandable mistake. After all — why would the GLO suspend our infrastructure funding if we were compliant with their written demands?

When the city council twice considered legal action to release the infrastructure funds, City Manager Michael Kovacs twice requested the council not take an aggressive stance against the state. He believed he could free up our infrastructure funds more quickly if he were allowed to mediate among the interested parties. But you have to ask, if the developer has stated that the city of Galveston has not delayed public housing and the GLO controls the development's funding — what is being negotiated?

Documents resulting from an open records request may provide a disturbing answer. Local advocates appear to be privately communicating with the GLO and implying that Galveston's infrastructure funds not be released until their concerns are met.

Among their 10 requests are that the city's code enforcement be suspended on the north side of Broadway, residential demolition and condemnation on the north side of Broadway be suspended, and that certain zoning lines be redrawn.

How did the conciliation agreement's sole demand that Galveston replace public housing on a one-

for-one basis give birth to a complete abdication of Galveston's right to have public policy crafted by elected officials?

How did the local advocates attain an authority over federal disaster funding denied to any other community group? Could the answer be because Galveston's city council ceded, without a fight, its authority to be the sole creator of local public policy? That undoubtedly helped. On the other hand, the city council consented to all of the GLO's written demands in exchange for promised infrastructure funding only to be betrayed and slapped with a suspension of that funding.

It appears to this councilman that the GLO has covertly transferred the governance of Galveston's recovery from Galveston's duly elected and appointed officials to a group of local advocates whose legal authority is, at best, unclear.