

Commentary: Let's get out of our own way

Monday, February 9, 2015

By [Steve Jagler](#)

Since 1851, Wisconsin's state motto has been "Forward." However, these days, a more appropriate motto might be "Just hold on a minute..."

Sir Isaac Newton's Laws of Motion, which stated, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction," would aptly apply to modern day southeastern Wisconsin.

It seems that for every project proposed for the region, someone or something arises to try to stop it.



The Couture

This trend began when developer Rick Barrett proposed the \$122 million, 44-story Couture apartment high-rise for Milwaukee's lakefront. Up stepped a group, "Preserve Our Parks," to oppose the structure, claiming the site lies in the original Lake Michigan lakebed. Some also complain that another new skyscraper would block their views of the lake.

Then, Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Co. Inc. offered to take the dilapidated O'Donnell Park parking structure off of Milwaukee County's hands for \$14 million and transform it into something useful. However, the Milwaukee County Board rejected the offer and then came back a few days later and proposed requesting private sector bids to fix the structure, which literally is a deathtrap.

Across town, the new owners of the Milwaukee Bucks and their investors are offering to kick in \$250 million to \$300 million in private investments to build a new arena in downtown Milwaukee. But they will surely meet resistance from some out-state legislators opposed to committing any more state resources toward Milwaukee. And the Wisconsin Center District, which operates the Milwaukee Theatre and the UWM Panther Arena, could be standing in the way.



Milwaukee Streetcar

Meanwhile, the federal government is willing to kick in \$54 million to develop a streetcar system in downtown Milwaukee, and groups, led by Aldermen Joe Davis and Bob Donovan, rise up to oppose the plan. That case appears to be headed for court.

Further south, the Menominee Indian Tribe proposed building a Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Kenosha. It surely would have been a regional attraction that would bring Illinois residents across the border. However, the Forest County Potawatomi, seeking to squelch any competition, filed a lawsuit to stop it and Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker rejected the plan.

Let's connect some dots here. With the Couture, a new Northwestern Mutual tower and possibly a new 50-story JohnsonControls Inc. headquarters in the works, not to mention a new arena and a streetcar system, downtown Milwaukee could be transformed for the next generation.

If we'd only get out of our own way.

article sponsor



© 2015 BizTimes Media