

Dear Editor:

On Monday the Rolla City Council will possibly consider the purchase of the U.S. Forest Service land where the Rolla Chamber of Commerce office and the Rolla Visitor's Center are located.

In my opinion, these discussions offer an opportunity to revisit the 1993 contract between the chamber and the city in which the city agreed to turn over 90 percent of the city motel tax to the chamber for the next 25 years to "promote tourism."

Since 1993, the motel tax has grown from approximately \$150,000 per year to around \$250,000 per year - and is likely to continue to increase with the addition of more lodging facilities.

This contract between the city and the chamber called for up to 30 percent of the proceeds to be used for capital improvements and debt service; up to 30 percent for administrative and operating expenses on the visitors center; and at least 30 percent on the direct promotion of Rolla, specifically for tourism and as a location for conventions.

I will not address here the imprudence and impropriety of signing a multi-million dollar, 25 year, no-bid contract with a private corporation like the Rolla Area Chamber of Commerce. That is water under the bridge. We must move on from here.

In my opinion, the memo of understanding that was presented to the City Council in closed session repeats the mistakes of the past. If we are to buy the Forest Service land - and I believe that we should - I would propose the following:

1. The 30 percent capital improvement / debt service portion of the motel tax be retained by the city of Rolla and used exclusively for the necessary payments to the U.S. Forest Service and for acquisition and capital improvements for Rolla's park system.
2. Upon purchase of the Forest Service land, the Chamber of Commerce offices will be in a building belonging to the city of Rolla and paid for by city tax dollars. If the Chamber of Commerce wishes to remain in this building they should lease it from the city at fair market value.
3. The Chamber must give the citizens of Rolla a full and detailed accounting of how they spent around \$2 million of city tax money over the past 12 years. This should have been done a long time ago. It is time to demand full public disclosure.

Only in this way can we put the past behind us and begin to move forward.

Sincerely,

Tom Sager