

TOP STORY SPOTLIGHT

Judith Lee: Davenport City Council needs to retake its authority

Jul 16, 2025

I recently served two terms as a Davenport Alderwoman and I still actively participate in council meetings as a citizen, fully committed to the betterment of this city.

I attended Mayor Matson's State of the City speech, in which he spoke about many accomplishments, framing them within five of Davenport's policy pillars. However, he ignored Davenport's sixth and most important policy pillar: "High Performing Government." The viability of Davenport depends on having a fully functioning and transparent government, one devoted to service to its citizens.

Davenport's flaws were revealed by the collapse of 324 Main Street. That shocking event brought to light a cascade of concealed failures and poor judgments. When you look deeply at its underbelly, I believe that Davenport is a barely functioning government.

This is what I have observed — and experienced — over the last 5½ years from our mayor, city administrators, and attorneys:

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- They have covered up what I believe is corruption and wrongdoing, intimidating and retaliating against those who try to expose it.
- They signed secret agreements with now-former employees without the review and approval of council, then paid out \$1,940,000 to two executive secretaries and the former city administrator, hiding the pre-election actions until well after the last election.
- They have actually sued a citizen — for nothing — and lost. Taxpayers paid for that.
- They have bogged down litigation on the collapse of 324 Main St., allegations of inspection fraud, release of the Spiegel agreement, the subpoenaed recordings of the executive sessions, FOIA requests, and more.
- They have concealed from council and the public payments of at least \$2.5M to outside attorneys since 324 Main St. collapsed. You and I continue to pay for the city attorneys and these outside lawyers. Can you imagine what good Davenport could have done for the city with \$2.5M-plus? Perhaps repair some roads? Hire more inspectors? Maintain our parks?
- They tried to silence me for speaking out about my concerns for public health and safety with Mayor Matson's Veteran's Memorial Park, built on the contaminated Old Davenport Dump site and excavated in violation of state law. This weedy and unusable "park" has so far cost over \$1 million in taxpayer money.
- They held a sham tribunal to remove an alderman, secretly organized multiple council members to support it, and gave him 24 hours to find an attorney and set up a defense. I voted against the removal, and the next day received an abusive email from the legal department criticizing me for my vote.
- Two executive secretaries, the former city administrator, and the former city

attorney attempted to defame me and others with false allegations completely lacking in evidence and documentation, all demanding large payoffs from the city, hoping I would crawl away. Well, I haven't, and I won't.

It has been Davenport citizens, not city officials, who have been doing the heavy lifting obtaining the information concealed by the city using the Freedom of Information Act. It has been citizens who fought for the Department of Criminal Investigation report on possible accountability for the collapse of 324 Main St.

This has to stop. Citizens shouldn't need to sue the city, the mayor, and the city administrator to get Davenport government to accept accountability and responsibility for their actions, their non-actions and how they spend our money. We should not have to depend on citizens to get crucial information concealed by the city. Enough is enough.

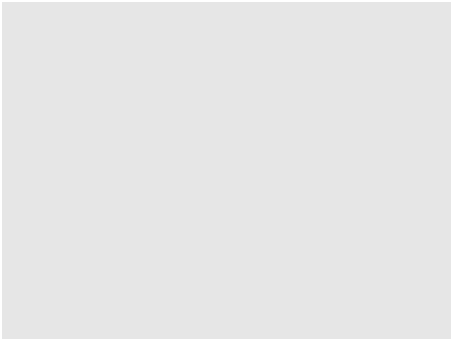
Our past is still our present, but it does not have to be our future.

I believe the following actions are needed, to start, with the active support of the mayor, city administrator and staff:

- As our elected officials, the city council needs to retake its lawful authority as the decision-making leadership of Davenport from the mayor, city administrator, and corporation counsel, and insist that staff provide them and the public with timely, detailed, and accurate information and analyses.
- The council must be fully briefed on the details of outstanding litigation, and have preliminary and final approval of legal strategies, balancing the costs of continuing certain lawsuits and settling when expedient for the good of the city and its constituents.
- Developers seeking tax breaks and loans must be better vetted by staff and council regarding outstanding loans, tax and other liens, history of poor property management, code violations, unsafe and unhealthy conditions, and other problematic practices.
- Davenport must work with our sister cities — Rock Island, Bettendorf,

Moline, East Moline, and Riverdale — to create affirmative relationships and address mutual problems, including regarding our unsheltered residents.

Davenport deserves a “high performing government” with less secrecy and drama, fewer power plays and cover-ups, less chasing “shiny pennies,” and better planning and informed decision-making that serve us, the people.



Lee

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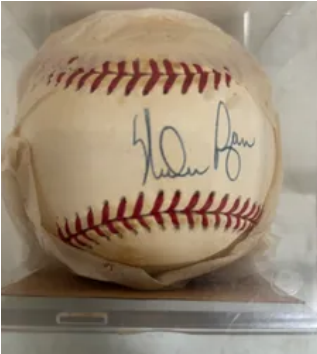
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