

# So many questions to be asked...eventually

Our town seems to have an aversion to questions. We seem to prefer our government and our institutions just do things – or not do them — right or wrong, legal or illegal, and then – and only if we must – perhaps get around to answering a few questions about what is to be done, or why it was done or how it was done.

Officialdom seems irritated by questions. The president of the Marion City Council seems particularly sensitive on this point.

Not to belabor the obvious, but we are still awaiting answers to questions from 10 years ago about the Old YMCA. That’s all we’ll say about that.

More recently we’ve been asking questions about what is euphemistically called “central dispatch” for the summoning of emergency help throughout the city and county.

What would seem the relatively simple task of combining city and

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A MOMENT

Ed Breen



county emergency telephone and radio assistance under one roof has become a multi-year and multi-million dollar something-or-other. I said “under one roof” purposefully, because, you see, the one roof under which they have been assembled leaks. It did when they began, still does, despite several hundred thousand dollars poured into a derelict building, the old bank building at Third and Washington streets. Water through the roof.

Water in walls. Water in the basement. Why? Simple question still unanswered.

Why that building? Why the complications? What to do with the first and second floors of prime downtown real estate? Why \$3 million for transmitter towers that weren’t even discussed in the simple “central dispatch” proposal.

The “whys” abound. They are endless.

Why, for instance, do some Grant County school boards permit their superintendents to live not only outside the district they are serving, but outside the county? They do. There are several. Is it too much to ask well paid educators to live within the neighborhood that is paying their salary?

Why are not-for-profit organizations solicited for membership in the Marion Grant County Chamber of Commerce? What, exactly is the role of the Chamber these days, and how does it differ from the job of the

Economic Growth Council? Just asking because a great deal of money, public and private, is spent to sustain them.

And while we’re discussing those organizations that are here to improve the lives of the disadvantaged with donated money — and there are dozens of them — just how much charitable money is being spent on the salaries of top management in all these agencies?

Why? Doesn’t logic dictate merging of common interests and reduction of well-intentioned people working at cross purposes?

And why so many of them? As one wag pointed out, “we find a new problem in the community and our first response is to start a new not-for-profit to fix it.”

We have created a safety net for the chronically unemployable so vast that it has become a growth industry. Why? One observer put it this way: “We have become a destination for broken

people.”

Why do we permit the Community Foundation to intrude into the private sector so deeply that it threatens to scuttle a for-profit business venture in downtown Marion?

And speaking of private business ventures, why do we sit by quietly – silently – as Marion General, our community hospital, which is owned by all of us, gives several hundred thousand dollars of your money and mine to bail out the failed attempt to save the private, for-profit business venture that is Meshingomesia Country Club? And without explanation. Not a word for those of us who have made the hospital a wealthy institution with millions in the bank. Why?

See what I mean: the “whys” are endless. Why has the not-for-profit Marion Housing Authority been permitted by its board of directors to invest deeply in failed commercial real estate around town? Its

mission is to house the poor and elderly, not become a captain of industry. Boston Hill Center; the hole in the ground where the old Marion Sheraton Hotel once stood, now an eyesore at the east entrance to town; a commercial building on the Courthouse Square, all owned by a group that is supposed to be doing something else. Why?

These questions aren’t so hard. They aren’t accusatory. We’re just asking them of those to whom we entrust the management of our town. We are participants in this.

Because we are in a changing world driven by social media, the trusted watchdogs of old – the newspapers – don’t have much bite in them anymore.

But the absence of the watchdog does not give license to the unwatched to barge ahead with impunity, to not explain themselves to those of us who are paying their way, paying the bills, paying their salaries.

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