

Over the past two years, I served on the Board of Directors for the Parks Area Foundation (PAF), a community-building non-profit on Des Moines' Northside. During my time on the board, my focus was spent on the opening and operations of the newly constructed Prairie Meadows Riviera Stage at Riverview Park in the role of Riverview Committee Chair. This project was made possible through a partnership with the City of Des Moines, in which the city holds ownership of the amphitheater while PAF holds a long-term contract to run operations at the venue. The gross revenue generated from PAF events, both in-house productions and third-party bookings through PAF, are split between PAF and the City.

On March 4, 2022 I attended a regularly scheduled stakeholder meeting at the Polk County Administration Building to present a progress report to Ward II City Council representative Linda Westergaard, Polk County Supervisor Tom Hockensmith, and Des Moines Parks and Recreation Director Ben Page. Also in attendance were Parks and Recreation Superintendent Laura Murphy, and PAF Board members Sadie Trytten, Emily Jones, Bill Thompson and Pam Thompson.

Part of that report contained the lineup for our free concert series, Rendezvous on Riverview (RoR). With two slots left to book, I expressed our committee's intention to diversify our entertainment with the addition of the local hip-hop artist B.WELL (Billy Weathers). This was met with strong opposition from the City Council and Polk County representatives. In response, we were told explicitly that there should be no hip-hop permitted at Riverview, especially at the free RoR community events. I immediately expressed my concern that not allowing an entire genre of music, which represents part of the culture and identity of a large portion of the community we serve, felt discriminatory and asked for clarification and reasoning on their position.

Council member Westergaard and Supervisor Hockensmith's response to my concern was that hip-hop was "not appropriate for the venue" and does not represent the "family values and traditions" that our stakeholders expect for the public concert series. I again asked for clarification on this viewpoint. Supervisor Hockensmith then expressed his "disgust" for the 2022 Super Bowl halftime show, and cited it as an example of why hip-hop acts should not be held at Riverview. He added that the genres' use of lyrics which speak out against the police were another reason to not allow hip-hop.

Council member Westergaard explained that she wanted music suitable for everyone, saying that hip-hop is not family friendly and we need to stick with tradition. She used last year's Riverview Music Festival, a hip-hop festival put on by Des Moines Music Coalition, as an example of why hip-hop should not be allowed at Riverview. I prodded her to elaborate and was told that she received complaints following the event. To my knowledge PAF did not receive a single complaint about this event. DSM Parks and Recreation did receive around three or four noise complaints, which is not atypical following an event of that size and scope.

Throughout the meeting, Parks and Recreation Director Ben Page attempted to mediate the discourse in an effort to de-escalate tensions. He explained how many of these concerns were already addressed through procedures such as sound-level monitoring from our in-house audio

technicians, security on the ground, communication with the bands before and after bookings, and strict cut-off times to end the shows. He also made it a point of emphasis that Riverview Park is a public park. Director Page did not echo the same sentiments held by Councilor Westergaard or Supervisor Hockensmith on this topic.

In an attempt to move the conversation forward, I explained that even if we couldn't agree on the ethics of the matter, we needed to think through the optics of this decision and recognize the likely blowback from the public which would be extremely negative for all involved. Councilor Westergaard then became very upset and stated that this was a private meeting and I was not to speak publicly on this conversation and I was not to mention her name to anyone in regards to this matter.

After a heated exchange on the topic, I declined to accept the demands that were being made. We were then told that PAF's booking of a hip-hop show at RoR would result in the complete withdrawal of support for PAF and Riverview Park from both Hockensmith and Westergaard, including previously discussed funding to Parks and Recreation for a permanent restroom, ADA-compliant parking, and additional capital improvements at Riverview Park with a price tag of around \$650,000. These projects were met with excitement when discussed at the beginning of the meeting, and support was assured by Westergaard and Hockensmith at that time.

Shortly after this meeting, I was made aware that Councilor Westergaard and Supervisor Hockensmith were upset with my unwillingness to uphold what I felt to be a discriminatory request. They then urged PAF board members involved in the meeting to call for my immediate resignation. While I disagreed with the reasoning for this action, I sent my letter of resignation on the following Monday, March 7, 2022, which took effect on March 8, 2022, with the best interests of the Northside community in mind.

Signed,  
Tanner Briggs Faaborg  
[REDACTED]@gmail.com  
03/25/2022