

# When Personal Safety Trumps Personal Freedom

## City Council's Concern For Civil Rights Is Far-Fetched And Inconsistent

**E**arlier this summer, a 25-year old man was brutally beaten in a downtown Columbia parking garage by a group of seven teenagers ranging in age from 13 to 19 years old.

The attack was captured by a video surveillance system that had been installed in the garage. Because that camera was in place, five of the seven assailants have been arrested and it won't be long before these thugs are off the street. One of the teenagers involved has a rap sheet that includes 16 prior offenses. He is being held in the Boone County Jail on a \$100,000 bond. That's the good news.

The bad news is that this type of crime has become all too common in parking garages, alleys and on side streets in Columbia. In spite of the clear evidence of a trend, city officials and a handful of city council members say we should not overreact. However, after viewing the video of the vicious beating, I couldn't help but feel the tempta-

tion to overreact. Like any parent, I kept thinking to myself, "What if that were my child being attacked?"

Miraculously, the victim of this particular attack did survive and, to his credit, has made it his mission to have video cameras installed throughout the downtown area with the hope it might deter future incidents. As part of his effort, he appeared before Columbia's city council on July 20. His request was that the city council consider reversing a decision made two months ago not to fund surveillance cameras in the downtown area. You may recall that downtown merchants had agreed to fund 50 percent of the costs of the cameras. The city would only have been responsible for funding a mere \$25,000 for the system. Not a bad investment when you consider the value in giving downtown shoppers the benefit of a little peace of mind.

On a vote of 3 to 4, the council voted not to even consider the young man's request. Voting "no" were council members Paul Stutz, Karl Skala, Jerry Wade and Barbara Hoppe. Showing tremendous disrespect to the victim and his family, these four council members voted against even having a discussion on the merits of funding a video surveillance in downtown Columbia.

Could their opposition stem from the city's current budget woes? Apparently not. In the very same meeting these four council members voted in favor of giving millions of dollars of tax money to private developers for TIF projects, money that would have ultimately gone to our public schools. The only excuse muttered by two members of the fabulous foursome was an overriding concern for protecting the civil liberties of those who patronize downtown Columbia merchants and establishments. Hmmm.

Of course, my thoughts immediately referenced the red-light cameras being installed at 14 Columbia intersections. These cameras not only snap your picture, they capture a picture of your passenger and your license plate and record the time and date you're driving through the intersection. Frankly, I don't see the difference. Why are my civil liberties being compromised by one camera, but not the other? Could it be related to the fact that the city of Columbia can make money off one of the cameras but not the other?

I don't buy their argument. Unfortunately, not enough people in Columbia are paying attention and, consequently, the village idiots are now running the village.

### Teen Curfew

As I viewed the video of the gang of seven teenagers brutalizing this victim, I couldn't help but think that this crime might have been prevented had there been a teen curfew in place. As I've said before, I like the idea. In addition to reducing crime and mischief committed *by* teenagers, a teen curfew would also help prevent crimes from being committed *against* teenagers.

In addition to reducing teen crimes by as much as 30 percent, experts believe that teen curfews can also foster a more active parental responsibility. To be successful, parents and guardians must be engaged in the process and assist in its enforcement. If we, as a community, approach curfews not as a punitive approach, but more as a well-intended intervention on behalf of our teens, there will be far greater acceptance for curfews.

Let's see how the council feels about the civil liberties of teenagers.



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