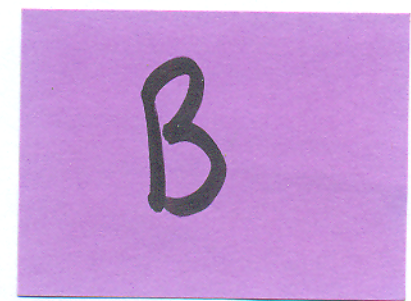


Evanston Council Is Found In Violation of Meeting Law



April 01, 2000 By Brian Cox, Special to the Tribune

Evanston Alderman were unrepentant Friday in response to a letter from the Cook County State's Attorney's Office scolding them for meeting behind closed doors – in violation of State Law – to discuss real estate and other issues critical in landing a huge development project.

“This whole thing is just a matter of interpretation on the State's Attorney's part,” Ald. Dennis Drummer (2nd) said Friday. “They're nitpicking.”

The City Council violated the state Open Meetings Act in July, August, and September when lawmakers and city staff members met in executive session to discuss issues related to Evanston's attempt to bring the \$100 million Church Street Plaza Development to the city, the March 24 letter said.

The city also failed to give proper public notice and failed to meet other requirements for a meeting to be held in private, the 11-page letter said.

“Is is a serious violation? It's all in the eye of the beholder,” said the letter's author, Assistant State's Attorney Karen Griffen.

The findings angered members of a citizens group that had rallied against the Church Street Plaza Development, under construction near the heart of the city. The City Council held dozens of closed-door meetings last year to discuss real estate issues related to the development and to talk about how the city should negotiate with Northbrook-based Arthur Hill & Co. the project developer.

“From the beginning we've said we weren't given access to the process,” said Margaret Newman, a former member of the grass-roots group opposed to the project. “I fear this secrecy was intentional. I hope people will look at this whole thing critically.”

The State's Attorney's Office started its investigation last fall after Evanston resident Howard Weinstein complained the City Council may have been “running roughshod over the rules.”