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Inside this edition

Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation announces creation of Taliesin Institute, sparks conversations about educational legacy

Taylor Scott, *Managing Editor*

The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation recently announced the creation of the Taliesin Institute, a new collection of programs that seek to advance the principles of organic architecture, seen as the core of architect Frank Lloyd Wright's work. However, other stalwarts of Wright's legacy debate the need for such an initiative following the Foundation's final split in 2020 from the school of architecture previously in residence at Taliesin.

The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, based in Scottsdale, Arizona, is a nonprofit organization founded by Wright himself in 1940 to continue his ideas of organic architecture. Organic architecture is Wright's philosophy promoting harmony between human habitation and the natural world. The Foundation explains, for Wright, a truly organic building develops from within outwards and is thus in harmony with its time, place, and inhabitants. After Wright's death in 1959, ownership of his Taliesin estate in Spring Green, as well as Taliesin West in Scottsdale passed into the hands of the Foundation.

According to the Foundation, the new Taliesin Institute will focus on providing education, outreach, and information to architecture and design students, new and established design professionals, and the broader public interested in learning about the history and future of organic architecture principles.

The Foundation said in a statement that it believes those principles are more relevant today than ever before and are evolving to respond to the changing needs of our world — citing climate change and sustainability, cultural and economic development, and new modes of living to help design, build, and live better now and in the future.

According to the Foundation, the Institute will have a particular focus on hands-on work aligned with Wright's insistence on learning by doing, creating public classes, symposia, and workshops that reflect the evolving nature of Wright's principles of organic design and their relevance to the way we live now, and in the future.

To lead these programs, the Foundation has brought on Jennifer Gray, Ph.D., a Wright scholar who recently was the Curator of Drawings and Archives at Columbia University's Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library. Dr. Gray was responsible for the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation Archives, containing more than one million elements including Wright's drawings, writings, and photography.

Dr. Gray is also an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at Columbia and has taught at Cornell University and The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Dr. Gray was also the co-curator of the MoMA exhibition *Frank Lloyd Wright: Unpacking the Archive*.

The Foundation notes that in addition to her expertise on Wright's work, Dr. Gray's research explores how designers, notably Dwight Perkins and Jens Jensen, used architecture, cities, and landscapes to advance social and spatial justice at the turn of the 20th Century. She also is interested in contemporary social practice, curatorial practice, the history of architecture exhibitions and questions of critical heritage.

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Arena Public Works superintendent resigns, rush to fill position internally leads to open meetings law complaints

Nicole Aimone, *Editor-in-Chief*

On Feb. 15, Village of Arena's Public Works Superintendent Michael Schmidt submitted his resignation, with a month and a half notice. By the next week, the village was already holding a meeting to interview internal candidates. That rush to hold an interview resulted in several village officials having open meetings law complaints filed against them.

In his letter of resignation, Schmidt thanked the village board for the opportunity to work in and improve the town that he grew up as a part of, while stating his last day will be March 31.

Hired several years ago in the midst of complete turnover in the village public works department, in a matter of months Schmidt rose from a part time position, to full time, to the department's first formal superintendent.

In his letter of resignation, Schmidt encouraged the board to continue with projects they had worked to begin: the second well and improvements on the sewer system he said are necessary long term investments to make for Arena, seeing the parks as an asset that can bring families into the village and work with the community to use the parks and improve them, continuing to work for village employees to retain the talent the village already has.

With a second municipal water well and a long-sought path to the village's West Pond Park incoming, as well as a dog park and more established during Schmidt's tenure, Schmidt was humble when asked what he was most proud of.

"I am proud of the things that we have done, and I appreciate the opportunity I had here," said Schmidt, demurring. "But I feel that the focus now should be on the future. The village board and whomever they select as the next superintendent will be able to decide what that future will look like."

As for the future?

"The board should ask [public works assistant] Andrew Bauer to take on the superintendent position. Andy has the knowledge, work ethic, and judgment to take on this role. He is the best person for this position," said Schmidt. "During the remainder of my time I will work with Andrew to make sure he is prepared to take on the superintendent position."

Seeming to take Schmidt's advice, the Village of Arena Personnel Committee set a meeting for Feb. 22 in order to interview Bauer in closed session. However, notice of the meeting wasn't legally sufficient and the committee went into closed session without the requisite roll call vote, both violations of Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law.

Editor's Note: *Due to multiple violations of open meetings law, Valley Sentinel filed complaints with the Iowa County District Attorney's office on Feb. 23. The complaints are civil and may result in forfeiture or, in some cases, voiding of the meeting. The complaints will be available online at www.valleysentinelnews.com.*

Legal analysis of the meeting and the application of Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law can be found in our legal editor's column on page 2.

Katie Green's Plain and Simple Correspondent: Black History is Our History

Katie Green, *Columnist*

Just underneath the thin sheath of pigmented skin we all wear, all humans are the same. Scientists agree race is a complete fiction. But race has been used for far too many centuries to assign worth to human beings in the interests of power, money and ego enhancement, among other ignoble aims. February was Black History Month, one of the numerous periods set aside in hopes of prodding forgetful people to remember and honor all kinds of things. Famous people. Births. Deaths. Diseases. Movements. Preoccupied with other demands on my time and health, I failed to lift up this important national event – at least it is important to me and multitudes of others – in a timely manner.

Katie Green

In my high school days, as my family moved from notably homogeneous territory in the Sierra Nevada mountains to the cosmopolitan Bay Area, the literature and culture (at first especially music) of the Blacks burst in upon my consciousness as a revelation. Black church music broadcast on the radio, so highly ornamented, often in call and response patterns, was as exciting as a jolt of espresso. The Methodist Church I grew up in was like cold decaf diluted with cream and sugar. Black music helped me throw off the straight jacket and open myself to many changes.

The poetry, plays and prose of Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Maya Angelou, and Toni Morrison, none of whose works were taught in any of my classes, I discovered slowly. They were followed inevitably by older and younger spokespeople for justice over centuries, the likes of Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Martin Luther King, Jr, W.E.B. DuBois, Malcolm X, Angela Davis and on down to present writers such as former President Barack Obama.

The poet Nikki Giovanni is my current teacher. My report card may not be so good yet. I still have much to learn about what it has meant to be Black in America, to sincerely try to get inside the beings of our preyed upon or dismissed fellow citizens. Being an elderly female has provided some good training over the years, since so many opportunities were closed off to those of my sex when I began life's journey in 1939.

I have my friend Emily Benz to thank for introducing me to poet Nikki Giovanni. Emily and her husband, Jeff Wright, were involved with a mostly-Black school on the South Side of Chicago for the better part of a decade. She taught and he was Principal in this full-immersion experience. I'm not sure what impulse caused Emily to gift me with a huge volume of the first thirty years of Giovanni's collected poetry and for months I struggled with it, not because the poems were obscure. No, no, but because the early poems were only too clear. So direct, so to the point, so hostile toward Whites...and toward male Blacks who didn't allow equal roles for their womenfolk, who were mostly considered only handmaidens during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. The incendiary flames of her anger, frustration, and ongoing pain as a young woman scorched me through and through and I had to lay the book aside. I told Emily that it was too raw for me to read. For half a year it sat sizzling on my bedside table, steam rising from the unread pages, although the cover photo shows a broadly-smiling woman, welcoming the reader to enter her orbit.

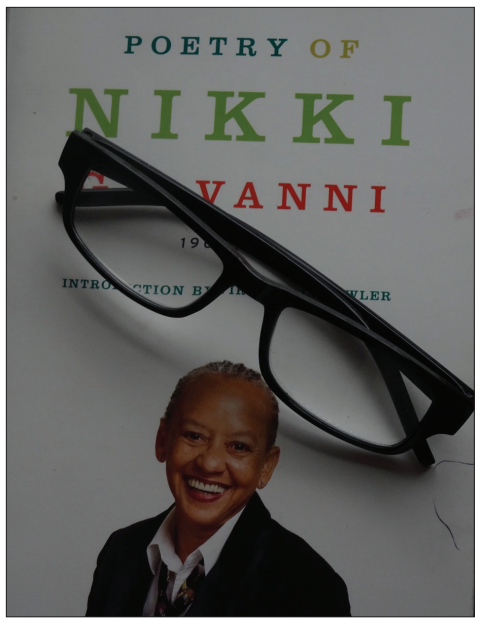

Photo contributed by Katie Green

Katie Green's reading glasses on her copy of Poetry of Nikki Giovani.

This summer, I nerved myself to pick up the book again. I survived past the smoldering poetry of the early years and into the period when she moved on to concentrate on sisterhood, the need for love, tenderness and motherhood, the joys and fears thereof. This familiar territory allowed me to lower my guard. By now Ms. Giovanni is 78 years old, has been practicing her art for half a century, honored at universities, conducting workshops many places, and I'm sure to find much to appreciate in her mature work as I continue to explore it.

My family has not been innocent where race relations and exploitation are concerned. One esteemed ancestor "adopted" a Native American child in the 1600s, a child who I've read was essentially a slave. And one branch of my mother's Virginia plantation owner kin were wealthy enough to possess and enslave Black human beings in the 1700s. Of course I feel a dab of guilt by association, enough that I decided it behooves me to up the ante, sensitize myself to the ongoing situation because I'm an inheritor of profit from a despicable practice. I know I take much for granted, conditioned into my genes, much I don't see. It doesn't take much brainpower to perceive that there's a long way to go in this country toward accepting people of color into full participation and opportunities. An uncle I prized, whom I thought perfect, fell off his pedestal one evening when he revealed his ugly racial bias in the presence of my children, who were as shocked as I. Whether I shall ever truly comprehend what it is like to be Black in America is debatable, but the attempt is worthwhile.

Skin tones are so variable. As I have written in some other essay, my husband and I sometimes call each other Brownie and Pinkie. I am brown with polka-dotting freckles, he is definitely pink as Winston Churchill's famous pink silk pajamas, but we are supposedly White. It seems like a great deal of fuss about nothing significant.

Since every day is Mother's Day as far as I'm concerned, I'll close by quoting the beginning of Nikki Giovanni's exceptional poem "Hands: For Mother's Day."

I think hands must be very important...Hands: plait hair... knead bread ...spank bottoms... wring in anguish...shake the air in exasperation...wipe tears, sweat, and pain from faces...are at the end of arms which hold...Yes hands...Let's start with the hands...

And now I hand it off to you.

Legal Column: Complaints filed with DA against Arena officials, open meetings law violated - analysis

Gary Ernest Grass, esq., *Legal Editor*

On Tuesday, February 22, at 8 a.m. the Village of Arena Personnel Committee met, made a recommendation to accept the resignation of Arena's superintendent of public works effective March 31, and started right in working on interviewing for a replacement. If nothing else, the committee moved with laudable speed to fill a hole that was not even official yet.

By the next day, the Valley Sentinel was lodging complaints with the district attorney.

Why? Not because of anything specific to do with the candidates for the position, nor the way they were interviewed. The issue was one of transparency. The Valley Sentinel believes in open and above-board government, and it believes that to preserve this, open meetings laws need to be enforced with some degree of rigor.

There were two main violations: the notice of the meeting was issued late, and the mechanism for going into closed session was faulty. According to the Attorney General, the "two most basic requirements of the open meetings law" are to give advance public notice of each meeting, and to operate in open session unless an exception is carefully satisfied. Here both were faulty.

One needn't worry that because the Sentinel went to the district attorney that it wants anyone locked up over this. That isn't part of the law. The first step in enforcing the open meetings law is a complaint to the district attorney or the attorney general. Usually in local matters, a complaint to the DA is typical.

Nor does the Sentinel want to nullify the meeting and have it done over, although the law provides for that. There isn't any reason to think that the Personnel Committee would have taken different substantive actions in this case had there been greater public scrutiny. There was no direct harm.

But the Sentinel and I think a reminder is useful that transparency laws are important. We want public officials to strive to operate as openly as possible. The least they can do is follow the law.

The Wisconsin Open Meetings Law is not hard. Sure, it has its tricky bits. It has covered tens of thousands of government bodies for decades, so lots of interesting questions have arisen and some do not have definitive answers. But on the whole it's not that difficult, and there's a lot of help available. The DOJ has a nearly exhaustive manual for public officials and UW has some excellent video tutorials.

Let's talk about notice first. First, the Valley Sentinel receives direct notices by email. The open meetings law allows news media to request direct notice independent from that given to the public. Part of this is because the media play a special role in watching over government actions, and notice to news

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ON THE COVER

A winter day at Taliesin, Photo (2022) © Mark Hertzberg

From the artist: I have been to Taliesin countless times, but never in winter, until [recently] when we had a lunch date with our friend, Minerva Montooth. It had snowed overnight. We would not be able to get to Spring Green until noon, so there would be no photos in the morning's "golden light." — *Mark Hertzberg*

Mark Hertzberg is the author and photographer of *Wright in Racine* (Pomegranate, 2004), *Frank Lloyd Wright's Hardy House* (Pomegranate, 2006) and *Frank Lloyd Wright's SC Johnson Research Tower* (Pomegranate, 2010) and *Frank Lloyd Wright's Penwern: A Summer Estate* (Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2019). Hertzberg, the retired Director of Photography of *The Journal Times* in Racine, has won numerous awards for his work. You can find more of his work at: www.wrightinracine.com

Cover line trace graphic illustration by Julianna Williams

Community Column — Driftless Grace: Perspective

Grace Vosen, *Columnist*

I used to think that I hated February, but then I moved 300 miles north and encountered March. A short month of predictable cold, I learned, beats a month of expecting warmth and continually getting my hopes crushed.

This year, though, I find myself already anticipating spring. The longer days and greater frequency of bird songs are clear signs of change to me. While I'd like to say I've grown more attuned to nature, I've really just been spending more time looking out the window. The result is the same.

It's no secret that I hold prejudices against certain months, on this blog and elsewhere. But I also have the capacity to hope. There's at least one instance in my journals from those years up north when I headlined a January entry with, "Spring!". And even now, the plastic comes off of my windows on the first day of March – no exceptions.

Of course, it's all about what you value in a situation. I often equate cold weather with isolation and an inability to enjoy the outdoors. But from another vantage, the cold means I can get comfortable indoors while not having many demands on my time. People who love snow sports might even prefer the winter months (the horror!). I resolve to start appreciating each month for what it is — for the joy it brings — and not for how much closer it gets me to another month I think I'll like better.

Grace Vosen is a writer and conservation educator living in Spring Green. She blogs about both the human and nonhuman communities of our region at DriftlessGrace.com.

Legal Column: Complaints filed with DA against Arena officials, open meetings law violated - analysis

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media is thus especially important; another consideration is that a news outlet may cover many public bodies for its readers, and it would be difficult to have someone make the rounds to go to all the different places that the various bodies post their notices. So the Sentinel gets its notices by email, and relies on email notices.

Second, the rule is that unless there is good cause for a special exception to be made, every notice must be given at a time reasonably proximate to the date and time of the hearing, but at least 24 hours in advance. In emergencies, notice may be reduced to as little as two hours. Of course, governments often want to move quickly. Simply wanting to move more quickly and flexibly is not an excuse to offer less than 24 hours notice.

In this case the Sentinel received notice by email at 10:09 a.m. the preceding day. However, the preceding day was a state holiday, and the day before that was a Sunday. That means legal notice needed to be issued by 8 a.m. Saturday. It was 50 hours late and counted only as 8 hours notice. (There is actually a state statute that says to start counting from midnight.) This may seem like an obscure rule, but the notice would still have been late without it. Furthermore, the Village of Arena had previously been alerted to the rule and was forced to cancel some of its meetings because it noticed them on Sundays.

Of course, it would be a good idea to provide notice more than 24 hours in advance. Nothing in the law requires a committee to wait until just before the deadline to send out notices. There is a balance to be made between allowing members of a body greater liberty to add items to an agenda close to a meeting, versus affording greater notice. A committee well-organized enough to have candidates lined up for interviews before a position is even vacant should probably have been able to manage earlier notice.

The other issue was the closure of the interview portion of the meeting. The interview of a prospective public employee is allowed to be held in closed session. The exemption exists because a person is more likely to apply, and an applicant is more likely to be forthcoming in an interview, if guaranteed confidentiality. A public body may fear a lawsuit if private information is made public. Such a lawsuit might happen. Even allowing a candidate to be interviewed publicly may cause other prospects who place a premium on privacy to feel that this is expected, and not seek a position. So if the Committee wants to have interviews in closed session, the law allows it.

Here is what happened: The committee has three appointed members, plus the village president is a member of all standing committees. The chair, village president, and one other member were present.

One minute into the meeting, the chair read verbatim from the public notice that the item was closed session pursuant to section 19.85 of the statutes, for purposes which were described in language taken directly from the statutes: "considering employment, promotion, compensation, or performance evaluation data of any public employee…" and so on, to interview candidates for public works superintendent.

The chair stopped and asked how to proceed, and another committee member moved to close the meeting. The chair seconded. Seemingly there was no discussion or vote. Members of the public were directed to leave. Under the law, members of a parent body cannot be excluded, so at least one other Arena village trustee remained.

The announcement did not give subsection and paragraph of the provision that allowed this, but it quoted the statute, directed interested parties to section 19.85, and was specific about the kind of activity (applicant interviews) and the position (superintendent of public works). This follows almost perfectly the suggested manner for making such an announcement.

So what was wrong? Here is a case where sloppy parliamentary procedure collides with the law. The Village of Arena has adopted Robert's Rules of Order as its parliamentary authority. This is the little book that tells how to make a motion, when it can be made, and so on. In a small committee like the Arena Personnel Committee, the rules are intended to be looser and more informal.

But even still, it is useful to both the government body and the public to be organized. What happens in a large deliberate assembly is a model for what happens in a tiny committee. When someone moves that an action be taken, that is not a vote for the position, nor even a signal of support. It is merely a means of bringing it to the floor for discussion. The mover may vote yea or nay. Once an agenda item is brought to the floor, the chair should call for statements for and against the motion, recognizing speakers until debate is exhausted or called to a close by another motion. Then there is a vote, or the chair may see that agreement is unanimous and hold the vote only if someone rises in dissent. Either way, the members of the body have the chance to commit themselves for or against.

In the case of a motion to close a meeting, the law requires this. There must be a vote by which the position of each member is clear, and this must be placed in the record. If there was a vote here, it escaped the notice of the audio recorder and the other trustee who was present.

People who know about this requirement typically think it is for the public, so that they can know who voted to close a meeting and hold them accountable for that decision. But the requirement also disciplines members to think about their votes.

Each member of the governmental body is supposed to know what the motion for closure is for and make an informed decision how to proceed. There is no law that interviews of applicants must be held in secrecy. Perhaps they should be. But each member of the body is expected to seriously consider the interests of the public in an open meeting against the common interest to be safeguarded by closure.

Once an open meetings law complaint is filed, the DA has the opportunity to pursue the matter, but does not have to. Sometimes the DA will try to broker a settlement where the government agrees to reform its procedures or better train its officers in order to better protect public access to its proceedings. Or the DA may file a lawsuit, or may decline to do anything. When the DA refuses to sue, or lets 20 days go by without suing, the complaining party may sue in the name of the state.

In open meetings lawsuits, unlike most, the person filing the lawsuit is not considered the plaintiff: the state of Wisconsin is. In 1987, the state supreme court chided an official who was sued by the publisher of the Milwaukee Journal that it it did not matter how the newspaper was affected, because the "fundamental issue" wasn't the right of the media or a particular reporter, but "the right of the public to be fully informed regarding government business." This is of course what matters to the Sentinel.

If the DA does not pursue this matter, the Valley Sentinel will. Its lawyers will represent the people of the state of Wisconsin in a suit against the village officials. The Sentinel will not be eligible to recover a cent in damages, because it will not be the plaintiff. It will not seek to void the meeting. It will ask for its attorney fees, which it will try to keep modest. And it will ask for the one other remedy available: forfeitures.

In an open meetings lawsuit, officials can be forced to pay small forfeitures (as low as $25 for a minor violation). This may not seem like much, but it's fair for very minor violations. In most lawsuits against public officials they typically pay nothing, letting the public purse bear the costs. Here that is not true: the law forces the official to pay personally. More serious violations may warrant pretty serious penalties. An official who repeatedly and egregiously violates the statute may be fined up to $300 per violation, still not a fortune, but there have been cases where an official has been accused of dozens or scores of violations.

Our supreme court explained way back in 1979 that access to government functions was so important that the legislature intended all public officials to "practice a high degree of diligence for the protection of the public" so that unfairly limiting access would be virtually "impossible." The law is very strict because an official must "at his peril see to it that the regulations are not violated" — not just by his own acts but by the actions or omissions of others over whom he has authority.

Some local officials have lost sight of this high duty. Editors at the Sentinel are in a position to see that these lapses occur all the time. Often they are treated as no big deal. Previously, the Village of Arena attempted to pass an ordinance that would have illegally concealed some public documents from the people and allowed them to be deleted in violation of various laws. The same ordinance would have added illegal fees for records. The ordinance was blocked by a court and withdrawn. The suit cost the Village a few hundred dollars.

When the chair of the Personnel Committee asked conscientiously how to proceed there was laughter. This is not a laughing matter to the Sentinel.

A sense of perspective is important. No one here is seeking blood. But it would also be wrong to keep looking the other way. That would lead to more of the same, but with bigger stakes. Eventually, there would be a lawsuit from the Sentinel or someone else, and it would not be about forfeitures, it would be about voiding a government action, maybe some contract with lots of money at stake where the public did not have their say. Maybe something unpopular, or illegal, or harmful.

The Valley Sentinel is a watchdog. Mostly watchdogs bark when something is amiss. Sometimes, this one bites.

Better Broadband Policy: Bill improves program to send funds where they are needed most

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25 Mbps down and 3 Mbps up to participate in basic online activities like Zoom meetings, online school or telemedicine; and even at this speed, they will likely see delays. 'Good enough' service is not good enough and we should change our standards to reflect that.

In addition, this bill prioritizes fiber projects, but does not prohibit fixed wireless, DSL or cellular projects. In order to meet consumer expectations, the bill says that if a project is going to put fiber into a location where another project is offering a fixed wireless solution, the fiber should be prioritized.

It also prioritizes projects that bring at least 50% matching funds.

If a community and telecommunications provider is willing to invest in a project, the state should give priority to a project where the locals are invested in the project. We have communities and telecommunications companies that are willing to heavily invest in rural broadband and we should recognize this commitment.

Finally, this bill creates a challenge process for an ISP in or near a project area to challenge the project grant application if they currently – or will be providing – the same or higher speeds in the same location no later than 24 months after the date that the grants are made. This is meant to prevent state investment in projects that are already receiving significant federal funding.

More than $2.8 billion has been dedicated to broadband expansion in Wisconsin since 2014. A lot of these funds are still in process as telecommunications companies gear up for the next construction season this spring. We must respect the plans that are in place and the companies that are heavily investing in infrastructure so that we get the most bang for our buck.

We must continue to fine-tune and target Wisconsin's investments in rural broadband to reach the communities who are still waiting to be connected. Our small, local telecommunications companies, as well as larger providers throughout the state, are working hard to reach customers and we must support this work so that our people will be connected efficiently and effectively, as soon as possible.

I am optimistic that the Assembly and the Governor will approve this effort and work with us to make sure our investments in rural broadband are reaching the people who need it. Every session, we have taken meaningful steps to dial-in and focus our work on rural broadband expansion. This bill is one more step in this process. We have made tremendous progress and we'll continue to evolve until every consumer is connected.

As always, please do not hesitate to connect with me to provide input, ideas or to seek assistance. Send an email to sen.marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov or call 608-266-0703.