

# Village of Tinley Park Sues Erstwhile Planning Director Amy Connolly in Federal Court for Her Role in Buckeye Scheme



Amy Connolly

*Tinley Park, Illinois*

On May 1st, 2017, the Village of Tinley Park filed a scathing federal lawsuit in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois (Eastern Division) against erstwhile Planning Director Amy Connolly for deliberate breach of her fiduciary duties and for the significant harm she inflicted upon the Village by scheming with low-income housing project developer Buckeye Community Hope Foundation to tamper with the Village's zoning codes last year, for both Buckeye's and Connolly's own benefit (at great detriment to the citizens of Tinley Park).

You can read the 5/1/17 court filing below. The Village of Tinley Park has retained the law firm of Kozacky Weitzel McGrath to represent it in this matter. It is unclear upon whom the difficult task will fall to defend Amy Connolly's actions.

[We reported extensively](#) as this scandal has continued to

unfold. Email records and other documents obtained via the Freedom of Information Act showed that sometime in 2015 Connolly began scheming with Ohio-based Buckeye to knowingly tamper with the Village's existing zoning ordinances so that a low-income housing project without any street-level commercial space could be shoved into the downtown core (which was required by law to only allow developments that had street-level commercial components in that special "Legacy" business district).

The Village of Tinley Park had invested heavily in a years-in-the-making master development plan called "The Legacy Code" that was painstakingly designed to assure that any new construction in "The Legacy District" along Oak Park Avenue would include revenue-generating commercial real estate corridors, specifically in the form of street-level retail and other commercial businesses such as bakeries, restaurants, boutiques, coffee shops, and grocery stores (with condos or apartments above them on the second or third floors). The Village carved in stone a mandate for street-level commercial enterprises to blossom in this "Legacy District" so that pedestrian traffic (and corresponding vitality) could be encouraged in that part of the Village; the idea was to transform the Legacy District into the vibrant beating heart of a prosperous Tinley Park for generations.

Amy Connolly worked in concert with Buckeye behind the scenes to circumvent and defeat that mandate in improper ways, but was [foiled in her scheme](#) by citizen sleuths and concerned local residents who saw through what she and Buckeye were doing and raised Holy Hell about it at Village board meetings in February and March 2016.

A long string of resignations, ethics complaints, and lawsuits followed, culminating in last month's pivotal "drain the swamp" election when Tinley Park voters booted from office Mayor David Seaman, Clerk Patrick Rea, and other longtime office-holders that area residents held responsible for

allowing the Buckeye fiasco to ever happen in the first place. Tinley Park citizens “threw the bums out,” essentially.

Shortly thereafter, while Mayor Seaman and the other defeated public officials still held the reins, the Village announced it would be quickly settling a meritless lawsuit filed by Buckeye and paying that controversial low-income housing project developer \$2.5 Million to walk away from Tinley Park and abandon all plans for any low-income housing project there. This settlement angered many area residents, as it seemed to some outraged observers that Buckeye had essentially managed to extort taxpayers for a large sum of money when at no time did Buckeye ever propose building any project that actually satisfied the mandated zoning codes. Many wondered why taxpayers should foot the bill for any of this when the whole mess seemed to be Amy Connolly’s fault...yet, she never seemed to be held accountable for any of it.

The other shoe finally dropped when – on the very same day that new Mayor Jacob Vandenberg, a new slate of Trustees, and a new Village Clerk were sworn into office – the Village of Tinley Park filed suit against Amy Connolly to recoup the taxpayer money that was spent defending the Village during its year-long battle with Buckeye...a battle that the Village’s lawsuit contends would have never happened if not for Connolly’s scheming, tampering, and deliberate misrepresentations of the truth.

The no-punches-pulled lawsuit asks for a trial by jury and alleges that Connolly failed in her role as Planning Director and did not secure any large commercial developments for the downtown Legacy District, as she was required to do in her highly-compensated public position. The lawsuit accuses Connolly of abandoning her assigned task of locating appropriate commercial development in favor of circumventing the commercial requirement of The Legacy Code and creating a window for Buckeye to attempt to force through a low-income housing project that at no time ever met code requirements.

The Village contends that Connolly's motive was selfish, aimed at saving her own job by breaking ground on a construction project in the Legacy District (even if that project contained no commercial component, as was required).

The Village essentially appears to be making the argument that Connolly was desperate to be able to point to any new building at all that was constructed on her watch and – having failed to truly earn her high salary and accomplish anything worthwhile as a competent administrator and fiduciary – came up with an elaborate scheme to change the wording in a zoning ordinance through duplicitous means so that Buckeye could build its low-income housing project and she could, at last, have a building to point to and say: “That was built while I was Planning Director, so I should keep my job and big salary because at least something was built on Oak Park Avenue.”

Last year, Connolly abruptly resigned her position as Tinley Park Planning Director in disgrace and immediately left town for Racine, Wisconsin where, unbelievably, she was named the Development Director there in May 2016. [Residents of Racine](#) have questioned the wisdom of her hiring, especially in light of actions taken by her in Wisconsin [that seem consistent with her pattern of behavior in Illinois.](#)

The lawsuit filed against her by the Village of Tinley Park details willful and deliberate misconduct whereby Connolly abandoned her fiduciary duties and even actively worked against the interests of Tinley Park from roughly April 2015 through her resignation in May 2016. The Village's lawsuit asks the Court to recover the salary paid to Connolly during that time period, as well as awarding punitive damages to the Village to punish Connolly for her behavior and discourage other public officials from engaging in similar schemes with questionable developers such as Buckeye.

Ironically, at one point before her sudden resignation, [Connolly threatened a lawsuit of her own](#) against the Village

of Tinley Park for “discrimination” after she was placed on paid-leave while investigators were summoned to review all of Connolly’s dealings with Buckeye. That threat angered the community, as her own email correspondence (produced pursuant to FOIA) established that Connolly had indeed acted inappropriately, at the very least. Documents produced at various stages of the myriad lawsuits associated with this scandal have continued to paint an increasingly more alarming picture of what, exactly, Amy Connolly was doing with Buckeye and what she hoped to achieve for her own self-interests by doing it.

This latest lawsuit is seemingly the first court filing to assert the theory that Connolly’s motivation in scheming with Buckeye was to save her job as Planning Director...the best explanation yet put forward to explain why she tampered with that zoning code for Buckeye. To sell out one’s own town and community to an out-of-state developer (with an agenda at odds with what was best for residents) is arguably one of the worst things that a public official could ever do, especially knowing all the while that what the developer wanted to do to the village would completely destroy the carefully-crafted “Legacy Code” master development plan that Tinley Park had in place for years and had worked on so very hard.

Observers of public corruption no doubt will watch the *Village of Tinley Park, Illinois v. Amy Connolly* lawsuit carefully and eagerly await upcoming court filings. Should this case go to trial, one could expect a packed courtroom every day (with a fortune to be made in concession sales, if popcorn were allowed to be sold outside the gallery). In the interests of finally solving all mysteries and learning the full truth of what Connolly and Buckeye did behind the scenes to tamper with the Legacy Code (and why they really did it), one can only hope that the Village of Tinley Park accepts no settlement and the people ultimately have their day in court to compel Amy Connolly to explain her actions to a jury on the public

record.

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