

Two Milwaukee Aldermen Are Focus Of Federal Probe

By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

An ongoing investigation, first reported by me on Friday November 10, is focused on a pair of Milwaukee aldermen. Sources familiar with the federal investigation say it is premised on whether the aldermen in question have been improperly rewarded for their positions on issues.

I am not naming the aldermen. They have not been charged. Federal investigations sometimes lead to charges and other times do not. They can be based on concrete allegations or be fishing expeditions.

An attorney for Frank Productions, a Madison-based company that is seeking to develop a 4000-seat concert facility in the Deer District on property owned by the Milwaukee Bucks, flatly denied that the project is being investigated by the federal government. The attorney, Mike Wittenwyler, in an emailed statement said the recent Milwaukee Common Council approval of the project is not the subject of a federal investigation.

Wittenwyler, as of the time of this post, has not responded to my requests for a phone conversation.

I had earlier reported that the concert venue issue was an area of focus of the investigation. In addition, there has been intense discussion in city government circles about the issue. No one has publicly stated that anything inappropriate has happened but opponents of the project have bitterly complained about the approval of the facility. City approval does not mean the facility will be built and the developers still need to get financing which is currently difficult given the interest rate environment.

The Common Council approved the concert venue proposal despite adamant objections from operators of other local concert venues. The approval came after developers dropped a proposed 800-seat venue at the complex. The two aldermen in question had originally opposed the project but went on to support it.

Neither of the aldermen in question have commented to me about the investigation. Federal grand jury investigations are secret and it can be a crime to disclose them. However, when a probe begins and people are questioned, word of these investigations can get out.

The last time a Milwaukee alderman was implicated in a criminal scheme was when ex-alderman Willie Wade was imprisoned and placed on probation as part of a broad investigation into a long attempt by operators the Silk strip club to get approval for a bar in downtown Milwaukee.

The entire common council is up for reelection next year and the filing period begins in a few weeks. It is unclear if either of the aldermen linked to the probe is planning to run for reelection.

Mark Belling

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