

September 18, City Planning Commission

Originally, I planned to restate my previous speech about the exterior lighting ordinance given in the August 7 meeting; instead, I would like to thank the city for its current progress and talk a minute about why our city should adopt good light pollution policies.

Light pollution is waste. It does nothing to increase nighttime safety, utility or security. It is harmful to the nighttime ecosystem, a hazard and nuisance to those that must live, work and drive by it.

The National Park Service has tracked light pollution from cities as far as 200 miles away. What we do here in Kansas City affects the Western Half of Missouri and the Eastern Half of Kansas. Our light pollution affects our neighboring cities, counties, state parks and Scout Camps. What kind of neighbor are we?

95% of the State Parks in Missouri have at least Moderate light pollution problems. 75% are in the Severe category. The Heart of America Council for the Boy Scouts of America operates three camps for Kansas City area youth. Both Camp Naish and our Rotary Youth Camp have a night sky brightness of over 900% that of normal. Scouts attending these camps now sleep in twilight. Our special needs Scouts will never see the Milky Way, Halley's Comet or even many of the simplest constellations at Rotary Camp without your leadership and action. These and all Scouts have taken an oath - upon their honor, to do their best, to do their duty, to God and their country. Can we honestly say we are doing our best for our neighbors, for our children?

Outside these council chambers are the pictures of our city leaders that have preceded us. One of the pictures is that of former Mayor H. Roe Bartle nicknamed "The Chief". It is reported that owner Lamar Hunt liked Bartle's nickname so much that he renamed the Dallas Texans to the Kansas City Chiefs. H. Roe Bartle also served as our local Scout Executive and our third Scout camp is named after him. A renowned public speaker, I find myself wondering what he would say, what he would do, if he were standing here today realizing his camp has lost its natural night sky to pollution?

The Scouting movement is celebrating its 100th anniversary. What would our founder, Lord Baden-Powell say if he couldn't show a young Scout how to navigate at night using the North Star because lights directed into the sky prevented him from seeing it? Scouting has a simple goal, using an outdoor-based program to teach our youth how to become good citizens.

Both our American and Missouri flags have stars on them. A book about the flag published by the Congress in 1977 states: "The star is a symbol of the heavens and the divine goal to which man has aspired from time immemorial". George Washington is credited for saying: "We take the stars from Heaven, the red from our mother country, separating it by white stripes, thus showing that we have separated from her, and the white stripes shall go down to posterity representing Liberty." The stars have been mankind's guides for thousands of years, what right do we have hiding them from our children and future generations?

We have recently found a legal case where a business was successfully sued for exceeding light trespass pre and post curfew standards identified in IESNA RP-33-99 even though the city didn't have light trespass standards. Shouldn't we look at adopting something similar to these simple restrictions?

Our current city ordinances have language to prohibit lights shinning into the sky, has restrictions for light trespass for commercial properties and a lighting curfew for outdoor display lots, why would we seek to loosen these instead of making them tighter. Our Missouri State Motto is, "Salus Populi Suprema Lex Esto" (Let the welfare of the people be the supreme law). Are we thinking of the people when we let the heavens be blocked, emit glare into their bedroom windows causing them stress and reducing their bodies natural cancer fighting chemical production, reducing their ability to see when they drive?

A little bit of Kansas City history...

The year was 1910. In Kansas City a ten-year-old youngster took his three-year-old brother into the backyard to see Halley's Comet...The child would always long to go to the stars...By the time he was in his early teens, Robert Heinlein had read all the books in the Kansas City Public Library on the subject of astronomy... – written by Virginia Heinlein in "Requiem"

This year marks the 100th anniversary of Robert Heinlein's birth. Heinlein, also a Boy Scout here in Kansas City, was awarded 4 original Hugos and 3 Retro Hugos. Many remember him from his quote, "Pay it Forward." A 1988 Citation accompanying the Distinguished Public Service Medal awarded posthumously by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to Robert Anson Heinlein reads:

"In recognition of his meritorious service to the Nation and mankind in advocating and promoting the exploration of space. Through dozens of superbly written novels and essays and his epoch-making movie Destination Moon, he helped inspire the Nation to take its first step into space and onto the Moon. Even after his death, his books live on as testimony to a man of purpose and vision, a man dedicated to encouraging others to dream, explore and achieve."

In the mid 80's, Halley's Comet returned. How many of our youth stood in their backyards straining to see Halley's Comet through the light pollution? What will our sky look like in 2061 when it returns? How many potential astronauts, Mars explorers, Novelists, and artists are we holding back?

We can do better for youth, our residents and our businesses, we can do our best!
I would like to close by saying:
"Please, let no child be left uninspired"

Thank you for your time.
Robert Wagner