

Dear Residents of McDonald,

I want to take a moment to speak directly to you about the recent WFMJ “Watchdog” report concerning the Village of McDonald and communications with potential data center developers interested in our industrial park.

Back in August, WFMJ submitted a public records request regarding those communications. On Tuesday, September 15, they aired their report.

I believe the report presented only part of the story, relying on selected communications without providing the full context surrounding them. Because of that, I feel it is important that you hear directly from me about what was reported, and where things stand today.

The report referenced a text exchange in which I informed Barry Barenbaum (of applied partners) that I would ask the Planning Commission to research data centers, schedule a meeting in approximately a month, and begin a three-reading process.

What was not made clear in the report was when that communication occurred.

That message was sent on **March 25, 2025—roughly 18 months ago**. At that time, I knew very little about data center operations or the potential impact such a development could have on our community.

Many of you have rightly said that actions speak louder than words. I agree.

The clearest action is this: **no zoning changes allowing data centers has been enacted in the Village of McDonald.**

Why?

Because as Village leadership learned more, we realized this issue was far more complex than a routine Planning Commission meeting and a few changes to our zoning regulations. It required research, discussion, questions, and a thorough review of the potential impact on our community.

Our responsibility is to make sure that if development occurs, McDonald is protected.

Again, McDonald comes first.

The report stated that I failed to discuss a Community Benefit Agreement, or CBA.

A CBA is generally negotiated directly between a municipality and the end user of a development. At this time, Oppidan does not have an identified end user for the proposed project.

What Oppidan did present last week, during their public forum was a proposed payment to the Village of **\$50,000 per acre—approximately \$18 million**. That proposed payment would be

completely separate from any future CBA that may be negotiated by the Village with an end user.

I have stated on the record during multiple previous meetings that I believe a CBA is a necessity for a development project of this magnitude. Any agreement would need to provide meaningful benefits to our community. Those benefits could include a commitment to environmental impact mitigation, **revenue (for both the Community and School District), local/permanent jobs, and the use of local labor during construction**, among other considerations.

Those are not things I take lightly and I will fight to make sure McDonald benefits from any development at our industrial park.

From the day I joined Council 11 years ago, my goal has been the betterment of McDonald. I have made it a priority to speak with potential investors, developers, and prospective residents because I believe our community must continue to look for opportunities that can strengthen McDonald and secure its future.

At the same time, economic development cannot come at the expense of the people who already call McDonald home.

We are entering uncharted territory—something none of us, myself included, has ever experienced before. That means we have a responsibility to ask difficult questions, gather the facts, listen to our residents, and make decisions carefully.

The WFMJ report questioned my character and presented a picture that, in my view, does not accurately reflect who I am or how I have approach my responsibility to this Village.

I understand that some residents may still have concerns about “back-room deals” or personal gain. I understand that people have questions and I respect that.

All I ask is that before you make a judgment about who I am or what I stand for, **talk to me**.

My door has always been open, and it will remain open.

The report states that it may be “too late” in the process. The reality is that the “process” starts with a site plan being submitted to our planning commission. We have yet to have been submitted a formal site plan. **I do not have a vote on Village Council. Village Council members are the decision-makers, not the Mayor.**

My official title may be “part-time” Mayor, but I have never treated this position as part-time when it comes to my commitment to McDonald. I have a full-time career outside of serving as Mayor, yet I continue to dedicate a significant amount of my personal time to doing what I believe is best for this community.

I know that to some, that may sound like “lip service.”

I understand.

Words are easy. What matters is what we do.

Those who know me know that I have never, and will never, put the health, welfare, or quality of life of our residents second to anything.

I care deeply about McDonald. I want to see our community succeed—not just today, but for generations to come.

Last week, Village Council voted on a moratorium. Today, we are looking at options

I believe the best path forward is one that includes **transparency, community involvement, thoughtful discussion, and careful consideration of every opportunity and its potential impact on McDonald.**

We may not always agree. That is okay.

What matters is that we continue to talk, ask questions, listen, and work together toward the future of our community.

I am proud to serve McDonald, and I am grateful for the opportunity to do so.

My door remains open. I'm listening. And we are listening.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address you directly.

Sincerely,

Ray Lewis

Mayor, Village of McDonald