

Bryson fund control shifts

By WILLIAM KINCAID
wtkincald@dailystandard.com

CELINA — Mayor Jeff Hazel said he has concerns now that the Bryson Trust Fund's management has shifted away from Celina.

While updating the newspaper about plans to develop the new Bryson Park District along Lakeshore Drive, Hazel spoke on how management of the fund transferred about a year ago away from First Financial Bank's Celina branch to its Cincinnati offices.

"I think you've heard council express their concern about not having somebody local in the community" on the Bryson Trust Fund board, Hazel said. "Ed Bryson left the money here, not somewhere else. Obviously banking

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regulations have changed over the last 60 years."

Local attorney Molli Schleucher, who in the past has worked with Celina First Financial Bank officers representing the Bryson Trust, told the newspaper to direct all questions about the trust to First Financial's corporate media email account.

The newspaper sent an email to the account asking numerous questions, including why and when the trust management shifted away from Celina, who the new

trustees are, if the trustees have connections to Celina and how bank officials would respond to local city leaders' concerns.

Instead of answering each question, a media representative offered a single official statement.

"As a community bank, First Financial is dedicated to helping grow and enhance the communities in which we serve," the email reads. "Over the past several decades, the Bryson Trust has financed several projects which have had a significant, positive impact within the Celina community. First Financial Bank is proud to

continue our long-standing partnership with the City of Celina through overseeing the management and administration of the Bryson Trust."

Hazel stressed that as in the past, city officials had the ability to request trust funding only for capital projects.

"Nobody in the city, as far as in the government, nobody sits on their board," he said. "Nobody has that decision-making ability. All we can do is request."

Bryson Trust fund officers review city leaders' funding requests, with Mercer County Probate Court Judge Mary Pat Zitter having final say.

Prominent city attorney Ed Bryson, upon his death on Jan. 11, 1950, left part of his estate to what was then the Commercial Bank of Celina "for the use and benefit of the public playgrounds in Mercelina Park, Celina, Ohio, or to assist in the construction of a public swimming pool by said city." Through court approval, the intent of Bryson's charity was expanded to include all city recreational facilities.

The fund has for decades financed millions of dollars in projects such as the Bryson Pool, shelter houses, park restrooms and other recreational improvements.