

# Title: Manteno, IL **Rages Against The EV Machine**

Subtitle: *Can Small Town America **Take the Power Back?***

By Cody Dekens

The situation in Manteno has reached an impasse. On July 10, both sides of the Gotion debate appeared in Kankakee County court. Attorneys for Concerned Citizens of Manteno were joined by a sizable group of engaged, outspoken residents. Gotion's lawyer appeared via Zoom and said almost nothing. The contrast was telling: small town resistance in full force, facing down foreign industrial power, and no one on either side willing or able to negotiate.

That's where this article comes in.

With litigation underway, both parties are constrained. But American civic history offers countless examples of third-party negotiations, public, voluntary and outside the courtroom, when the stakes were high enough to demand them. This article is one such opportunity: an open invitation to compromise, not behind closed doors, but in plain sight. It's available to anyone with the courage to engage.

What follows is a nonpartisan, community-driven blueprint, a proposal designed to identify the risks, leverage, and best available terms before the courts deliver rulings that neither side may fully control.

## **Manteno vs. Gotion: Where Things Stand**

This conflict didn't begin with protest signs or press releases. It began quietly, through backdoor negotiations, land purchases, and an economic development package brokered by then Mayor Tim Nugent, now President of the Economic Alliance of Kankakee County. By the time residents learned that a Chinese owned battery manufacturer had quietly acquired over 630 acres, the opposition was already mobilizing.

For many, this fight is about far more than a factory. It's about trust: who earns it, who breaks it, and what happens when it's gone. Concerns over environmental safety, national security, CCP influence, and job protections have gone unanswered or delayed, leaving the community fractured and the company cornered.

To Gotion's credit, early outreach included sponsoring Manteno's Oktoberfest, attending Chamber of Commerce events, offering plant tours, and participating in local hiring fairs. But meaningful transparency didn't follow. When residents asked hard questions, Gotion closed the curtain.

Grassroots groups like Concerned Citizens of Manteno and OUTRAGE didn't emerge out of hostility, but necessity. In the absence of answers, they became the only real check on a deal that

might have otherwise advanced unchallenged. Gotion, by contrast, retreated into silence and legal maneuvering.

Now, both sides are dug in. What began as disagreement has hardened into stalemate. And if things stay on this path, the outcome won't be decided through collaboration, but by court order. No matter who wins, both sides stand to lose.

## **Projected Futures: The Three Roads Ahead**

At this crossroads, three possible outcomes lie ahead. All carry risk. None offers a clear win.

- 1. Gotion Wins in Court:** If the judge rules in Gotion's favor, the company can legally break ground. But it will do so on a foundation of suspicion. Every hiring decision will be scrutinized. Every safety report, questioned. Protests will continue, lawsuits may return, and public trust will erode further. A facility built without community support won't attract talent, partners, or goodwill. A legal victory may come at the cost of long-term viability.
- 2. The Opposition Prevails:** If Concerned Citizens or OUTRAGE succeed in halting the project, Manteno might regain symbolic control, but not the land. Gotion still owns more than 630 acres, nearly 20% of the town. They could lease it, let it sit idle, or sell it on their terms. Even if the factory is blocked, Manteno could find itself surrounded by land it doesn't own, can't use, and can't predict. A win on paper may leave the future boxed in.
- 3. Nothing Changes:** The most likely, and most damaging, outcome is continued stalemate. Legal delays drag on. Development freezes. Trust dissolves. Gotion holds the land. Manteno holds the resentment. And in between sits a fractured town, stuck in limbo, unable to move forward, unable to heal.

But there is a fourth path. One not defined by verdicts or silence, but by direct conversation, shared risk, and mutual benefit.

## **Leverage Map: What Each Side Holds**

In any negotiation, leverage isn't just legal, it's political, emotional, and strategic. It comes from time, public sentiment, capital, and control over the story. Right now, both Gotion and Manteno hold distinct forms of leverage that will shape what happens next.

### **Gotion's Leverage**

- 1. Land Ownership:** Gotion controls more than 630 acres inside Manteno's borders, nearly one-fifth of the town. That land includes the proposed factory site and adjacent parcels that could be leased, developed, or left dormant. Whether or not the factory moves forward, Gotion has secured a long-term physical footprint in Manteno's future.

2. **Legal Momentum:** If the Sixth Circuit rules in their favor, as many legal observers cautiously expect, Gotion will regain the right to proceed. Their legal strategy has been methodical, and their public silence likely stems from counsel's advice, not disengagement.
3. **Financial Backing:** With access to international capital and the momentum of the global EV market, Gotion can afford to wait. Delays that frustrate local governments or nonprofits may be merely a rounding error to a firm of this scale. Time is on their side.

## **Manteno's Leverage**

1. **Unified Resistance:** Manteno isn't merely skeptical, it's organized. Thousands of residents have unified behind a disciplined, sustained opposition. Their voices are amplified by elected officials and legal teams that reflect overwhelming public concern. This isn't scattered discontent. It's a **movement** with legal standing, political backing, and public momentum.
2. **Delay Power:** Even without a win in court, Manteno has already succeeded in slowing the project. Similar efforts across the country have delayed developments for years. Strategic litigation, backed by public support, can drain time, resources, and political capital from even the most well-funded developers. The clock is not Gotion's friend.
3. **Shifting Political Winds:** State and federal lawmakers are actively advancing bipartisan legislation to restrict foreign ownership of U.S. land, especially near critical infrastructure. Every delay brings Gotion closer to new laws and new risks. Manteno doesn't need a courtroom win. It may only need time for Washington to act.
4. **Narrative Control:** This is no longer a local issue. National media and policy circles are watching. If Gotion continues to press forward against a vocal community, they risk becoming a case study in failed foreign development. But if Manteno authors a fair, forward looking compromise, it could set the national standard for how small towns protect their future without rejecting opportunity.
5. **Community Gatekeeping:** Manteno still controls local partnerships, access to the regional workforce, and the infrastructure support any major employer needs to thrive. These aren't entitlements, they're relationships. And without them, no company, no matter how well funded, can operate successfully.

This moment calls for patience, principle, and clarity of purpose. And the side that understands its leverage, but chooses to use it in pursuit of peace, will shape what happens next.

## **The Proposal: A Blueprint for Rebuilding Trust**

If either side wants to avoid the worst-case scenario, something must change. The following **Seven Point Proposal** is a community centered blueprint, not a demand, but an invitation. It's a

first step toward rebuilding trust, protecting Manteno's long-term interests, and preserving Gotion's investment under a new framework of mutual respect and accountability.

This is not a legal settlement. It's a civic reset.

It assumes two things:

1. Gotion intends to operate in good faith.
2. Manteno seeks not just to resist, but to build something better.

If embraced, this proposal could become a national model for how American towns and international firms can move forward together, without sacrificing sovereignty, transparency, or community voice.

## **1. PUBLIC TRUST LAND TRANSFER**

**Proposal:** Gotion will donate or sell at a significantly reduced cost, at least 30% of its undeveloped land (approximately 200 acres) to a nonprofit land trust administered by Manteno residents.

**Purpose:** To ensure that a meaningful portion of the land remains under local control for public benefit.

### **Use Options:**

- Public parks and green spaces
- Affordable housing initiatives
- Economic incubators or nonprofit-run facilities
- Conservation or educational projects

**Why It Matters:** This transfer helps rebalance land power in Manteno and reduces fears of a "company town" scenario. It mirrors successful models used in utility, mining, and oil settlements across the U.S. Local land ownership is the foundation of community control, and this restores a portion of it.

## **2. BINDING LOCAL WORKFORCE AGREEMENTS**

**Proposal:** Gotion will enter an enforceable Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Village of Manteno guaranteeing:

- Prioritized local hiring
- Fair and competitive wages
- Inclusive recruitment practices

- Job training programs through local schools and community colleges

**Enforcement:**

- Measurable hiring benchmarks
- Clear diversity and equity standards
- Financial penalties for noncompliance

**Why It Matters:** This ensures the factory benefits local workers, not just transient or outsourced labor. It builds a career pipeline for Manteno residents and strengthens community ties through economic opportunity. Without local hiring guarantees, promises of “good jobs” ring hollow.

### **3. ENVIRONMENTAL ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK**

**Proposal:** Gotion will exceed state and federal environmental regulations through a locally binding Community Environmental Assurance Agreement.

**Key Components:**

- Continuous third-party emissions monitoring
- Real-time public dashboards for air, water, and chemical handling data
- Joint emergency planning with Manteno’s fire, EMS, and public health agencies
- Annual community environmental impact reports

**Why It Matters:** Regulatory minimums aren’t enough. Residents deserve full visibility into how the factory operates and how risks are mitigated. This framework builds trust not through statements, but through data, oversight, and emergency preparedness rooted in local control.

### **4. GOVERNANCE TRANSPARENCY DECLERATIONS**

**Proposal:** Gotion will issue documented public assurances that no board member, executive, or parent company affiliate is tied to the Chinese Communist Party or any foreign government body that could influence U.S. operations.

**Optional but Advised:**

- Voluntary alignment with CFIUS-style transparency standards (Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States)
- Annual board disclosures modeled after U.S. defense contracting protocols

**Why It Matters:** Whether real or perceived, national security concerns cannot be waved away, they must be addressed directly. This measure removes ambiguity and meets rising bipartisan demands for transparency in foreign direct investment.

## 5. CULTURAL & CIVIC ALIGNMENT MEASURES

### Proposal:

- Gotion will establish an independent **Community Advisory Board** made up of Manteno residents, with quarterly public meetings and reporting power.
- The company will adopt a **Community Values Pledge**, affirming its alignment with American legal norms, labor rights, human rights, and civic principles.

**Why It Matters:** These structures invite real participation, giving the community direct ways to engage, respond, and be heard. The Advisory Board provides a direct voice for the community, and the Pledge signals cultural integration. In a global economy, this is how international firms demonstrate that they don't just *operate* in America, they *belong* here.

## 6. FIVE YEAR LAND USE MORATORIUM

**Proposal:** Gotion will place a binding 5-year moratorium on any non-factory development across its remaining undeveloped parcels not already under construction.

**Purpose:** To provide Manteno time to:

- Review and update local zoning regulations
- Conduct long-term infrastructure planning
- Engage residents in future land use conversations
- Avoid uncoordinated or speculative industrial sprawl

**Why It Matters:** Without a moratorium, adjacent land could be developed rapidly, without oversight or alignment with Manteno's long-term goals. This pause isn't punitive; it's protective. It gives the community time to think, plan, and prepare. ..together.

## 7. COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT FUND

**Proposal:** Gotion will create a \$15 million **Community Contribution Fund**, distributed over five years and administered by an independent, locally governed foundation. This is modeled after successful community benefit agreements (CBAs) in Oregon, Nevada, and Tennessee, where industrial entrants contributed to long-term local wellbeing as a condition of operation.

### Fund Priorities:

- Public education and teacher support
- Emergency services (fire, police, EMS)
- Public infrastructure (roads, water systems, broadband)
- Local nonprofit and charitable projects

**Why It Matters:** When a corporation builds in a small town, the benefits should be seen and felt by the people who live there. This fund is a tangible commitment, a visible reinvestment into the community's future, beyond tax breaks or temporary jobs.

## **Why This Matters**

This proposal is measured, practical, and built to succeed. Every point draws from real-world precedent, offering solutions that have worked elsewhere and can work here. It reflects the values Manteno already lives by: transparency, accountability, fairness, and a commitment to future generations.

If Gotion accepts it, even partially, it signals a willingness to build trust and repair what's been lost. If they reject it, the message will be equally clear.

## **Consequences of Rejection: What's at Stake**

Rejecting this proposal doesn't reset the clock. It accelerates the damage.

If Gotion and Manteno choose to remain on opposing tracks, litigating instead of negotiating, then both will bear consequences that are immediate, measurable, and increasingly irreversible.

These outcomes aren't speculative. They're already forming in real-time.

### **For Gotion:**

1. **Operational Hostility:** A factory built without public trust becomes a permanent conflict zone. Every hiring campaign will be met with protest. Every environmental report will be challenged. Every attempt at community partnership will be viewed with suspicion.

You may have the legal right to build, but you'll be building in contested territory, surrounded by resistance that won't fade with ribbon cuttings or press releases.

2. **Political Risk:** Time is not neutral. Every month of delay brings new political threats. State and federal lawmakers are actively advancing legislation that could prohibit or undo foreign landownership near sensitive sites.

Your land rights could be weakened not by lawsuits, but by a single vote in Springfield or Washington. What seems lawful today could be illegal tomorrow. And the longer the stalemate drags on, the more politically vulnerable your position becomes.

3. **Reputational Damage:** National attention is rising. If Gotion continues to press forward without compromise, it risks becoming the poster child for foreign overreach, an object lesson in how not to enter an American community. In an industry built on brand trust and public image, that damage could outlast the project itself.

Even if you win legally, you may lose the trust of the marketplace, the workforce, and the public you rely on.

## **For Manteno:**

1. **Permanent Land Loss:** Even if the lawsuit succeeds, Gotion still owns the land. Over 630 acres, nearly 20% of Manteno, could remain locked behind corporate fences. The land could sit idle. It could be leased. It could be sold to unknown parties. And none of that would be within the town's control.

Winning the fight might still mean living in the shadow of its outcome.

2. **Investment Stigma:** Without resolution, Manteno risks gaining a reputation, not as strong, but as stuck. Investors watching from afar may conclude this isn't a town that protects itself, but a town that can't find a way forward. Gridlock isn't a deterrent to Gotion alone, it sends a signal to everyone else watching.

Protecting your community shouldn't mean closing it off from the future.

3. **Division Without Direction:** Prolonged litigation doesn't just exhaust budgets, it exhausts people. As lawsuits stretch into years, residents will splinter. Alliances will fray. Public energy will drain. Without a deal, the only guarantee is more friction, more confusion, and more lost time. Rejecting this path doesn't just prolong the fight, it shifts the burden to the next generation. They'll bear the cost of a decision they were never allowed to make. Don't make them pay for our silence

This proposal isn't just about solving a problem; it's about preventing a slow bleed. A long, painful erosion of possibility. And if both sides refuse to act, the losses won't fall evenly, but they will fall on everyone.

## **A Shared Future: If We Get This Right**

It's not too late.

This blueprint is more than a set of proposals; it's a chance to reset the relationship. Not through silence. Not through surrender. But through a public act of good faith.

If Gotion responds with openness, it can transform from a symbol of corporate overreach into a model of responsible development, proving that international companies can thrive in American communities not by overpowering them, but by partnering with them.

If Manteno stands firm in its values, but opens the door to honest negotiation, it can do more than stop a factory. It can define the terms on which growth happens in small town America and show other towns how to do the same.

And if both sides take that step, if they meet not in court, but at the table, they can prove something radical in this moment: that trust, once broken, can still be rebuilt. That transparency is not a threat, but a strength. That compromise is not weakness, but leadership.



This is how history turns, not with press conferences or verdicts, but with people choosing dialogue over defiance. Choosing to try, even when it would be easier not to.

So let it be recorded, not by verdict or press release, but by choice. ..

**Let the future say we tried.**