

March 17, 2009

Robert R. Braun  
Braun Consulting Group  
1326 Fifth Avenue, Suite 339  
Seattle, WA 98101-2614

Dear Mr. Braun:

Delegates from each of the four departments we represent (Health, Planning, GIS, EM) participated in a Union Budget Action Committee (BAC). The goal of the BAC was to compile employee ideas about ways to generate funds for the General Fund and/or prevent hemorrhaging. Prior to the formation of the BAC team employees were tasked by their management team to do the same. Employees submitted various cost saving measures to Administration for consideration and have yet to hear back about what measures were approved and what measures were rejected and why. The following is a re-submittal of the same ideas submitted by employees to Administration. IFPTE Local 17 requests that Administration provide feedback as to what measure have or will be adopted and what measure were rejected and why.

- When the County takes payment via credit card the County is charged a fee from the credit card company. Per RCW 36.29.190, this fee may be incorporated into the fees the County charges the entity who is utilizing the county service. This prevents the public at large from subsidizing the individual who chooses to pay via credit card. This credit card fee should be incorporated into the entire current fee schedule for the County or the County should eliminate the use of credit cards. (The Auditor's Office does not take credit cards and is therefore not incurring this credit card fee)
- Skagit County is not consistent about the enforcement and collection of fees for code violations. It would make good business sense and public interest sense to consistently levy fees against entities that build without a permit, impact critical areas, and operate or establish a land use activity of any type without the required "special use permit" or variance. This would not only require violators to pay the public back for the misuse of the public lands but would prevent taxpayers from subsidizing their violation. To this end it is nonsensical that in the last round of layoffs the Planning Department laid off the two code enforcement officers who were revenue generating and had the capability of generating much more revenue. For this measure to succeed the County must take the policy stance that they will enforce and protect land use code in the interest of the public even if it is politically difficult.
- Discontinue the use of consultants. Study after study proves and documents that contracting out work that a public employee can do is not good business and costs taxpayers millions of dollars. <sup>1</sup> Conceptually it does not makes sense

---

<sup>1</sup> For examples of study findings that prove contracting out work is counter to the public's interest please inquire with the Union further.

to contract out work to an entity that must make a profit off of the taxpayer when public employees do the work without profit preventing the need to build in a profit margin. Also public employees have more institutional knowledge and safe guards built into the public system to protect the public interest. The Union can provide various examples of unnecessary use of consultants.

- Bargain for a strong part-time and job-share program and encourage employees to utilize this option by creating incentives to participate. These programs cut down on recruitment and retention issues and help keep skilled workers in house, especially women.<sup>2</sup>
- Recently, the Planning Department and DEM staff suggested fee increases. The majority of the proposals were not implemented and not presented past the management level for review. For the most part the increased fees applied to large projects and applications that utilize an inordinate amount of time. It is suggested that those original proposed fee increases be re-visited or an explanation provided to employees as to why this option was not implemented.
- Skagit County has always been very liberal with the Current Use Taxation (Open Space) program administered by the Assessor's office. i.e. As property that formerly had been assessed and taxed at the Farm & Ag rate is developed through subdivisions and perhaps is no longer eligible for the Farm & Ag rate, these parcels should be re-assessed at the current rate. This is only one example. The other Current Use Assessments are Timber and what is commonly called "open/open" space. In discussion with Assessor's Office Staff, the removal of property from taxation programs is occurring at time of development. But at the same time, the property being removed from one taxation program may be transferred into another due to ineligibility for residential development. Thus, in some cases, there is a potential for no net increase of assessment revenue. The assessment rate on most of these taxation programs is one-half to two-thirds of the normal assessment rates.
- Do not replace any vehicles with "new vehicles" during this budget crunch and do a countywide assessment of the need for existing county vehicles. Require that employees drive the most fuel-efficient vehicles available in the fleet. Inefficient vehicles (less than 20 - 25 mpg) should be put in the "emergency-only" or absolute need category. When replacing cars purchase alternative fuel vehicles.
- Stop all capitol improvement projects on County owned buildings/ lands that aren't essential, or under contractual obligation to be completed. Do not buy any additional properties.
- Charge all non-County government entities for the ICS 300 and 400 classes.
- Start charging for services that other counties charge for (review permits, driveway inspections, etc.)
- Make sure that internal County budgets are correctly charged to assure that

---

<sup>2</sup> For more information about how part-time work and job-share help the bottom-line and the community ask the Union for more information.

Public Works and grant projects are never charged to the General Fund as currently this sometimes happens.

- Recycle office supplies like three-ring-binders. Most office supplies can be reused instead of thrown out. This makes business and environmental sense. Create a better surplus supply system so that all Departments have access to surplus supplies.
- Do a countywide energy audit and determine ways the County could better utilize energy resources and implement the suggestions. There may be funds available to do this without cost or minimal cost if explored.
- County business license – cities currently require business licenses to operate within their boundaries. Why do we not have such a requirement in the unincorporated areas? (Frankly, many people are shocked that there is not one).
- Pet license laws/fees money should be directed towards animal control and animal bite follow-up that is currently underfunded. Fees should be raised if not adequate to meet the need.
- Reduce the amount of time spent by the County at Community Meetings ("Task Forces"), planning and implementation of fund raising events on work time (Kiwanis and Rotary meetings), and travel (use email or other virtual meeting tools like Skype).
- No Commissioner politicking on County time and no junkets.
- Retreats for managers, staff, and Commissioners should be cut.
- Bargain for the expansion of the ability to use comp-time instead of paid overtime.

We look forward to your detailed response to the issues we have raised and hope that together we can help deal with the current economic climate.

CB:dc  
opeiu8

cc: Commissioners  
Administration  
Stewards and Officers