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Public Comments Session Tues, 4/9/24 – Purchasing costs & activities buried in Economic Development department / budget

I've been wanting to get this topic in before more budget work sessions and budget hearing begin:

Right now, no citizen can look at our budget and see what we are spending on EcDev. That needs to change.

Our county is in need of well-paying job growth and increased commercial tax base. But we can't even tell what we're spending on EcDev.

The reason is that the EcDev budget number is inflated, because the EcDev budget includes what we are spending on some purchasing activity. Purchasing is the work for the county to buy stuff. That is an administrative and compliance function. Necessary, absolutely.

But it is not EcDev; it has nothing to do with job growth and commercial tax base. So instead of just focusing on job growth here, our EcDev staff are also helping our county government buy products & services from businesses outside the county. But some of that cost is buried in the EcDev budget.

And now, the county is in the process of hiring more Purchasing staff, but rolling that too into the EcDev budget...and under the supervision of the EcDev Director.

I acknowledge that this Board did not make the original decision to bury Purchasing expenses in the EcDev budget. I was in EcDev when some

Purchasing activity was originally moved into the EcDev department 8 years ago, and I objected back then.

We are a county in NEED of focused, prudent, data-driven, business-oriented strategies and tactics to advance job growth and the commercial tax base. YOU will make the budget decisions this year, and I suggest to you it is time for this to change.

By the way, do you know how many jurisdictions across the US have moved their purchasing staff & activities into EcDev since we started 8 years ago?

Of the 3,000+ counties & county-equivalents across the country, we are the only one I know of that has done this. This has not been a great idea. We have not started a trend.

In fact...we are willing to be leaders for embedding purchasing activities – a compliance function – in our EcDev department. But we are NOT willing to be leaders in passing legislation to remove a Commissioner from office for ethics violations.

I think we need to change our priorities.

So to summarize:

1. Put purchasing expenses & activities back in purchasing;
2. Have our EcDev budget reflect what we are spending on EcDev and make sure the Director has what is needed to help advance job growth and commercial tax base.

And, pass legislation to remove a commissioner for ethics violations, because that will be coming back to you in this Spring's legislative proposals.