

Subject: Public Forum- District's 2002-2006 Financial Plan and Financial Support of Community Organizations Sept. 15-2001- Municipal Hall

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A MESSAGE FROM ERNIE CRIST;

The Forum as Mr. John Hunter pointed out in his e-mail was poorly attended. I also agree with many of the other points John has made. I will state what I believe to be some of the reasons for the poor attendance. If such a Forum dealing with Community Grants to numerous non profit organizations with a cash value of hundreds of thousands of Dollars, not counting the value of land leased to them as the case may be, can attract no more than a handful of representatives then there is indeed something wrong.

For one thing it would appear that our communication system is not working. We have a communications officer (who was not present) but other than going through the mechanical motions, clearly we did not get the message out.

Did our communications office do more than just put ads in the paper or announce it on the District Web? Was there a telephone campaign? Were the groups invited to submit proposals as to how such a Forum might be turned into an important community event? How dynamic is our communication office in the first place? To what extent was our social planning department involved (not present either)? Was the importance of this Forum sufficiently conveyed to the stakeholders ?

Is it possible that we are on the wrong track altogether? Is it possible that the recipients of grants are not sufficiently interested in attending a once in a year forum in which their grants are being discussed?. Does this mean that they do not appreciate those grants or is it that the whole process has become so mechanical and bureaucratic as to lose all meaning?

These were some of the questions going through my mind as I looked at the audience.

As for the points I want to make I have 4 in mind

- 1) We should have three 3 year financial and budget plans which are taken to public referendum at the time of municipal elections to be part of the election debate.
- 2) All major proposed expenditures such as roads and other infrastructure, recreation, grants, parks etc. should be listed separately in the referendum. People should not only know exactly how much we propose to spend during the three year cycle but they should also know for what specific purpose. This is the only way for the public to truly be part of the budget process. It is also the only way to truly measure our efficiency. I have made this proposal in the past but without success. For reasons of their own both politicians and bureaucrats seem to fear this process. I believe I know why.
- 3) Budgets should reflect real increases, if any, not sham increases such as robbing Peter to pay Paul i.e. Heritage Fund, reserve funds etc., this, in any case, would not be possible in a referendum process as it would be decided by the public.
- 4) Community support programs should be debated as part of the three year financial and budget plans as well. All Grant recipients should be obliged to adhere to appropriate efficiency criteria including actual programs versus administration cost factors. In line with this. Support for ARTS (to support tourism) should be increased as an efficient way to promote tourism. Funding to the Chamber of Commerce for the same purpose should be terminated as being an inefficient way to promote tourism.

These are a few points I want to make in connection with the Forum. As it is, I enjoyed the contribution made by Mr. Kost and Mr. Hunter and the same goes for the Family Services. The spokespersons from the ARTS Commission and the ARTS Council, as always, were meek but at least they were there.

Ernie