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JAN 24 2011

CITY OF BURIEIN

January 24, 2011
To the Burien City Council
Re Lack of Burien City Government Transparency

To The Burien City Council;

At the first City Council Meeting of 2011, I was very concerned that two full time positions were going to be added to the Burien City budget but they had not been included in the 2010 budget review process. This is the same budget that, when the first public hearing was held in 2010, the city staff had no information available for the citizens to review in advance of the public hearing. As a result, the public hearing was a sham because no budget information was provided to the public to review or to be able to even comment on.

I am additionally concerned because the two full time positions will be filled by interns who will be paid at what could be considered a high salary for intern work-\$42,000 per year plus benefits at approximately 28%-total cost \$53,760. While we have been told these positions will only last one year, I have reservations that these positions will be turned into full time positions in the future. Also having been an intern and having done comparative studies on intern salaries, I consider this to be a high level salary for an intern who is supposed to be learning on the job. I am attaching a copy of the recent posting from the Puget Sound Regional Council for a Growth Management Planning Intern at which the salary is posted at \$13 per hr. However, what troubles me the most about these positions is that they were overlooked in the presentation of the budget to both the public and the Council.

Our city has an on going pattern of excluding important information from the public or the public process and then coming back to the Council and the public and saying that these were just housekeeping issues that were overlooked. Another specific example was that we passed a zoning ordinance in 2009 that was in complete violation of our Comprehensive Plan and then in 2010, the staff and Council came back and changed the Comprehensive Plan to match a zoning ordinance that should never have been allowed to pass (change to the Comp Plan Request 2010-1). The rule is that the Comp Plan rules over a zoning ordinance and a zoning ordinance does not drive or rule the Comp Plan. In theory, any items that were allowed under that zoning ordinance in 2009 and 2010 were illegal to be allowed. Those actions were in violation of the Comp Plan text. However when this request was brought by the city staff to public meetings, citizens were told that this was just a "housekeeping" issue that was now being corrected. This explanation lacked transparency on what had actually occurred. A zoning ordinance was passed in violation to the Comprehensive Plan because someone wanted it passed even though it was out of sequence of when it could be allowed.

As another example of an issue that lacked transparency, was how a new fee placed on all vehicles in the City of Burien by the establishment of a Transportation Benefit District (TBD). At first, the citizens were told at the public presentation that the street overlay project would be covered by the Capital Projects budget, fees from the utilities and garbage collection/recycle. Citizens were told that via these funding sources, the street overlay project that was presented would take 20 years to be paid for because of the cost of the bonds. Then suddenly the funding source shifted from the Capital Project budget dollars and fees collected from utilities to a

vehicle tax. Suddenly, a TBD was established but citizens were not told how long this TBD would be allowed to collect this fee. I requested this information at two separate public meetings and the information on how long the fee will last has never been disclosed by the city. Then the bonds were sold and the city was able to get a much lower rate than expected. Of course this savings should be passed on to the average citizen by reducing the number of years the vehicle fee will be collected. However when some citizens met with the head of Transportation, they were told that even he was not sure how long the fee was going to be collected but he thought it would still remain 20 years. This was because the city would not pass up the chance to collect monies for other projects that they wanted to do-not just the street overlay. Also, the extensive cutting of 96 significant trees along Ambaum was never discussed in the public presentation on this project. I would hardly call what happened in the Street Overlay Project to be the workings of transparent government.

At a presentation of the changes to the Comp Plan in 2009 and at a January meeting of the City Council in 2010, the record shows and citizens were told that 56% of the citizens in the North Highline Area had voted to join Burien. Over 14,000 citizens live in the North Highline annexation area. According to King County elections 1,380 citizens in the North Highline Area voted to join the city of Burien. This means that less than 9.8% of the citizens in the North Highline area voted to join the City of Burien. And in cross-checking the budget for the years 2008 and 2009, over \$25,000 was spent on publicity to promote this annexation to North Highline voters. This means that as a Burien tax payer, I paid in excess of \$18 for every yes vote that was cast in the North Highline Annexation area-not including the cost to run the election. Additionally, the election on this issue was held during a Primary election in an effort to reduce the number of yes votes that needed to be cast to pass annexation. However, 56% of the citizens in the North Highline annexation area never voted to join the city of Burien and the budget reports that we were promised on what annexation is really costing have still never been presented to the public. The disclosure on the annexation issue has hardly been transparent to the citizens at city public meetings.

For years the City of Burien has been planning a Community Center that included with it an activity area component for citizens. We even paid for a study on such a model. In numerous public discussions about taking over the old library, the old library was always considered to be the site of a temporary community center until the new one was built. In going back and reading the minutes of previous City Council meetings, the library site is referred to as the temporary, interim or transitional community center site. So I as well as a number of other citizens were surprised when it was announced in 2010 that the old library was now our permanent community center and there would be no further savings account in the budget kept for a new community center. This announcement even appeared to catch some council members by surprise. The old library may be Mike Martin's community center and the city staff offices he was hungry for but it is not the community center that this city or its citizens planned for or envisioned as the new community center. Once again, this decision did not appear to be a transparent decision that the public was informed about or allowed to have input into.

Additionally, this last year we had public hearings on other issues when there was not adequate information provided on the cost of the project or issue, where the funding would come from or even a consideration of whether the city could really afford the project. As a citizen, I have

requested that the city not bring these issues for public hearing until the most basic data is available to the public. Educated, thoughtful comments can not be made by the public on issues that lack the basic information.

In the numerous surveys that we are shown at public meetings, frequently the survey results are misquoted, misinterpreted or misleading when reported by the staff. Now this could mean that the staff has made an error in reading the survey results or does not understand statistics. Certainly in the models the staff used in the Lake Burien Neighborhood request for a change to the Comp Plan 2010-2, the staff had difficulty in appropriately using maps and models and providing accurate information on these models. When asked for the documentation on these models, it could not be provided. Again this raises the issues of transparency in city government.

Frequently within minutes after a “public hearing”, the vote is taken by the City Council without consideration of what has been said at the public hearing. This means that the public hearing was a required formality but a sham because the decision had already been made prior to the hearing. This again demonstrates a lack of transparency in government and how decisions are reached.

There has been an on-going push by our current city manager to remove more and more of the decision making process out of the public view and public arena for discussion. This is evidenced by his push to reduce the number of items that the Council needs to have the final decision on as well as suggesting that the Council reduce the number of times it meets each month. Essentially this moves the decision making power away from citizens and their elected representatives. Again, transparent government does not operate in this manner.

As a citizen (essentially the customer who is paying for this government), I would like to have the facts on the budget or other city issues that are presented for consideration:

1. in the correct time frame,
2. with no surprises after the issue has been approved/ no after thought additions or “Oops, we forgot”,
3. with attention to science and detail,
4. with respect and consideration for comments at public hearings,
5. with concern for the real cost to the citizen,
6. without discrimination because of the neighborhood that is making the request,
7. with concern for public health and safety,
8. with compliance with Comprehensive Plan and other laws, and
9. in an open and transparent format to the public.

If errors have occurred, they need to be corrected immediately without antagonist comments or dirty looks directed at the citizen/citizens who have brought them forth. Transparent government admits its errors and corrects them.

Sincerely,
Chestine Edgar

Attachment: Growth Management Planning Intern

Growth Management Planning Intern

Puget Sound Regional Council - Seattle, WA

Application Deadline: deadline expired (December 24)

Last Updated: November 16, 2010



Direct Apply

Applying to this position is quick and easy, upload your resume and hit apply!

Growth Management Planning Intern Details

Internship Fields: Program Planning & Development; Management

Start Date: Contact for Details

End Date: Contact for Details

Approx Hours: Contact for details

Compensation: Part-time to full-time, 30-40 hours per week; \$13 per hour with no benefits

Growth Management Planning Intern Description

Internship Description

The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC), established in 1991, is a regional planning agency with a mission to enhance the quality of life in the central Puget Sound region. The Puget Sound Regional Council develops policies and coordinates decisions about regional growth, transportation and economic development planning in King, Pierce, Snohomish and Kitsap counties. The Council is composed of over 80 county, city, port, transit, tribal and state agencies.

PSRC is an equal opportunity employer.

PSRC is seeking an Intern to provide technical support to professional staff related to the development of a pedestrian and bicycle planning toolkit. The position will assist with research, the development of reports, and the crafting of a toolkit to be used by local governments as they draft non-motorized provisions in their comprehensive plan transportation elements.

Performs various office related duties including staff support for committee and board meetings.

Our ideal candidate will:

- Have excellent technical, analytical, organizational, detail-oriented and oral and written communication skills.
- Have technical proficiency and working knowledge of a range of computer applications, including ArcGIS 9.x, Microsoft Excel and Access.
- Be familiar with editing in a versioned geodatabase environment, GIS analysis and relational databases concepts.
- Compile data; perform or assist in the organizing, analyzing, and interpreting of spatial data; and summarize compiled data and present summary in report, table, or map form.
- Standardize spatial data from various sources to make it compatible and translatable for PSRC transportation network, analysis and planning purposes.
- Summarize compiled data and present summary in report, table, or map form.
- Assist with the preparation of studies and reports, as well as the presentation of data and related analysis.
- Answer inquiries and assist the local staff regarding bicycle and pedestrian data.
- Provide support for committee and board meetings and organize logistics, prepare materials and assist in registration and conduct of meetings.

Minimum Qualifications:

Enrollment in a master's degree program for urban planning, public administration, geography, or a related field; or at least one year of planning experience; or any combination of education and experience that would provide the applicant with the desired skills, knowledge, and ability required to perform the job.

To Apply:

- To be considered, applicants must submit a cover letter, resume, and completed, signed PSRC application. The voluntary, confidential Equal Employment Opportunity form is appreciated for applicant tracking purposes.

In your application please include:

