06: Role of the Elected Official in the Budgeting Process

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So, what am I supposed to do with this?
What does this mean?

- What do all these numbers really tell me?
  - Is everything ok?
  - Do we need to make cuts?
  - Do we need to raise taxes?
  - Do we have money to spend?

- What do you want me to decide and vote on?

OR

- Are you just wanting my “rubber stamp” of approval?
Council’s Response

- Check the Math…..
- Compare the columns…..
  - Budget to Budget?
  - Budget to Actual?
  - Actual to Actual?
- Line item discussions…..Big numbers? What looks out of line?
  - Office Supplies?
  - Subscriptions?
  - Travel and Training?
Frustrations:

- We just sit through hours of presentations, asking questions, but don’t really have any input.....
- When we ask questions, we’re often met with defensive staff members, or are treated like we “just don't understand.”
- “Just trust us, we are the experts, after all.....”
- No room in the budget for any of our ideas.....
- There are “untouchables” in the budget that we just can’t discuss.
- How do I know we are actually spending our dollars effectively and are doing what we and our citizens want done?
Elected Officials Want to Know:

- What are the questions I should be asking?
  - How do I not look stupid?

- What do I need for staff to “show me”?
  - How do I ask the questions without staff thinking that I’m “micromanaging” or “out to get them”?
MICROMANAGEMENT
We have to keep our focus on the little picture.
Five common board/council excuses:

1. “The public expects me to have these answers!”

2. “How can I make decisions/policy if I don’t know the details?”

3. “I have to make sure that it gets done correctly.”

4. “I have some expertise in this.”

5. “We can’t trust staff. They make mistakes or filter information.”
Am I enabling micromanagement?

AM I A MICROMANAGER?
Complacency is as bad as micromanaging
Elected Officials Want to Know:

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- What do I need for staff to “show me”?
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- How can all this “data” be turned into “information” that we can use to make decisions and set policy?

- How can we have better conversations about our resources and what we are trying to do during the budget process?
Different Perspectives
How the customer explained it
How the project leader understood it
How the engineer designed it
How the programmer wrote it
How the sales executive described it
How the project was documented
What operations installed
How the customer was billed
How the helpdesk supported it
What the customer really needed
We tend to see what we expect to see.
Mismatched Perceptions?
Perception Drives Behavior
City Staff and Elected Officials

Sometimes I feel that I have the worst job in the world! Ya...right!
# We speak different languages

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<td>Conversation</td>
<td>“What do you hear?”</td>
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<td>Interests and symbols</td>
<td>Information; money, people, equipment</td>
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<td>Currency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dynamics</td>
<td>Conflict, compromise, change</td>
<td>Predictability, cooperation, continuity</td>
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