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CITY COUNCIL
CITY MANAGER

September 22, 2008

Mayor Richardson and members of the City Council:

I am writing to you regarding the City's budget situation and the threat posed by the anti-gambling initiative. I am writing anonymously, because I am a City employee who's on the chopping block and don't feel entirely free to express my views directly to you.

I would first like to say that I appreciate the way the City Manager has approached this issue, analyzing all programs, developing a detailed budget presentation where anyone can see the numbers and see that "plan B" is not a scare tactic, and letting the potentially affected employees know right up front what was happening. At my previous government employer, we had to read the newspaper to find out what was happening with our jobs and organization.

I also appreciate that the Council is taking input and thoroughly considering the situation ahead of time. What I am not happy about is the Council's seeming attitude that this is out of your hands and all you can do is plan for the budget and wait to see what happens.

I am very upset that the City has gotten itself into this situation with reliance on gambling revenue and allowed gambling to replace strip clubs and prostitution as the hallmark of Lakewood's reputation. When is Lakewood going to no longer be seen as the vice capital of Pierce County? I would vote for the anti-gambling initiative myself, if it was structured in a way that wouldn't devastate essential city services.

I don't have an idea which way the vote is going to go, but I know that there is very strong opposition to what gambling has become in Lakewood, and even if the initiative fails, the issue is not going to go away. "Casinos" will continue to be one of the issues that defines Lakewood. I also know that the potential consequences are too great for you to just wait and see; that is too big of a gamble.

What I am asking you to do is to be even more honest with the citizens, make preparations to do whatever you can to mitigate the impacts of the initiative passing, and take on the issue in a way that may take the wind out of the initiative's sails. Let the people know in no uncertain terms that this is not a scare tactic and that devastation of vital services is not an option. Prepare a package of fee increases, taxes, or whatever else it takes. Yes, it's a terrible time to do so, and yes, some people will say it's retaliation, but you have to make the hard decisions, regardless of what some people will think. There are many others who will understand. It's great to be able to say that Lakewood has the lowest taxes, fees, licenses, etc, but look where that has gotten us. Perhaps you can implement a plan in a way that will soften the appearance of retaliation, like putting a definite sunset date (3-5 years, for example) on increases, so they will go away after we've had time for economic development.

Better yet, let the people know you've heard them, and offer a reasonable solution. Apparently banning the casinos with an amortization period is no longer an option, and you can't do anything that would come across as lobbying for a particular vote on the initiative, but is there a way you could pass a resolution or in some other way make a firm commitment to ban casinos in something like five years, with a concerted program of economic development and other measures to wean the City off of gambling revenue in the meantime? I don't know if you could do something like this, or if this would even backfire, by allowing people to say, "see, the City knows it's wrong," but I'm asking you to do what I'm doing, brainstorm. Put everything on the table and see what you can come up with. This is not the time to just sit and wait. It's just too big of a gamble.

Thank you for your hard work and for taking the time to read this.

XIC - City Council
City Mgr.
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