



Connie's Council Update



Representing University Place, Fircrest, Downtown Tacoma, parts of Tacoma's North and South ends, Hilltop, and the Port of Tacoma

NEWS ALERT

Dear friends and neighbors,

The Pierce County Council recently considered a resolution to post the phrase, "In God We Trust," in our Council chamber. I would like to share with you my response to the correspondence I received from numerous individuals in our community:



Thank you for contacting me and sharing your views on the resolution to place "In God We Trust" in the Pierce County Council chambers. The correspondence that we received was overwhelming against this resolution. And yet a majority of the Council voted for it. There were two common themes in the responses that I received – it is not government business and the phrase is religious in nature.

I did not support this resolution and feel that the issue is not county government business and should not have been in front of us. When we have budget issues, shorelines management plan amendments, comprehensive land use plan amendments, a jail that is losing money and significantly impacting our budget, the mentally ill roaming our streets and camping out under our bridges and green spaces, drug use still rampant, and crime in general still an issue, the sponsor of this resolution determined that this is such an important matter that it trumps all these issues and we should spend time and resources to move his personal agenda forward.

Many believe that the word "God" injects religion into government operations. One of the emails sums it up well, "As a devout Christian I do not need or want my government promoting, endorsing, displaying or otherwise advocating for ANY god, any religion or any religious beliefs. This protects and respects ALL of our religious freedoms and, equally, respects those citizens, who you serve, who do not subscribe to any faith." This resolution has proven to be divisive and unproductive and has diverted the attention of the Council away from county business. I believe that our focus and our responsibility as elected officials are to provide an environment that is conducive to moving the county forward to become the leader in the South Sound.

I will continue to work on the issues that lead to good governance. It is helpful to hear from you when we have matters come before us. We need to hear your position on items such as the budget, crime, growth management, human services, and government operations, and yes, even resolutions that you feel passionate about. Thank you again for reaching out to me.

Sincerely,

2015 budget discussion begins

Our recent budget retreat provided a report on the county's revenue and expenditures as well as projections on our local economic outlook. The Pierce County Council has oversight, input and approval of the general fund. We are working on the budget for 2015 but I would like to give you a picture of our county expenditures for 2014.

The general fund budget for 2014 is \$271,095,840.

Approximately 80% of that is spent on public safety: law enforcement, courts, prosecution, assigned

council, and juvenile justice. The remainder is spent on other general government functions, such as parks and recreation, budget and finance, human resources, economic development, permitting, licensing, elections, information technology, and more.

The outlook for 2015 is reached by looking at a number of indicators measured from the first quarter of 2014 (as compared to the same time period in 2013):

- Unemployment is down 1.4%.
- Labor force participation has decreased for the fifth year in a row.
- For the second quarter of 2014 the number of individuals NOT participating in the workforce has risen by 793 per month.
- Revenue from property taxes is slightly higher than last year and sales tax is slightly lower.
- Overall, revenue is 3.2 % lower than the second quarter of 2013.

The revenue generated from the Corrections Bureau (the jail) continues to have a negative impact on our financial picture. We historically have contracted with cities to house their misdemeanor offenders. Those cities have chosen to contract with other jails in the region, which has reduced our jail revenue by 60%. The county is working with the Corrections Bureau to address estimated expenditures and revenue losses and to reestablish contracts with local cities.

We will build a budget based on forecasting developed from financial indicators as well as growth in population, cost of living, and citizens' needs. Based on the numbers that we have seen so far, I think it is safe to say there will not be significant, if any, growth in government.

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