



04/18/2023

To: Carver County Board

This memo memorializes concerns related to representative government and the implications of using one time funds for ongoing operations. Both in greater detail below.

1. Let's be the board that defends representative government.

In January, after what's believed to be 20+ years of being untouched and having adequately served the needs of the community the board operating rules changed essentially giving more authority to a single individual (the board chair) to decide what does and doesn't go on the agenda, and made the path to move items from consent to regular agenda more difficult. This passed lacking unanimous consent. In conferring with many city, township and county peers, it seems overwhelmingly unprecedented (in both operating rules and practice) to refuse a local elected representative the ability to move something from consent to regular agenda, deny the ability to add an agenda item, and deny public discussion and transparency of topics of material impact and interest to the public. The rule changes were utilized in March and April board meetings to deny moving items from consent and adding items to the regular agendas.

In the spirit of representative government, allowing differing voices to be heard, public discussion and transparency (and vote), and to minimize avoidable potential public perception and reputational risk to the county **I call on the board to restore board operating rules as it relates to consent, and effectively restore the ability of a duly elected commissioner to fully represent the people that put them in office.**

2. Let's be the board that leads a bold long term county vision and funding plan.

The items above that were not allowed to move from consent to the regular agenda were focused specifically on the use of one time dollars to fund ongoing operations only discussed previously in a closed work session (in this case, remnants from ARPA and Cares Act funds (federal covid relief dollars administratively converted to a more flexible account called BSA 'balance savings account'), and in this case to fund labor contracts). I believe we simply cannot continue to kick the can on known and/or future funding needs with unclear or unfunded plans.

My concerns include:

a. The message we're sending to our staff and community

-We dig ourselves a sizable hole in future periods and risk conveying to staff an assurance of reliable funding sources and sustainable operations in the future

b. Deferred maintenance

-An unhealthy reliance on vacancy savings or one time funds (often cumulative over 15 – 20+ years) has us seeing sizable deferred needs coming to a head (each estimated at 7 to 8 figures)

-20 Years of Parks Deferred Maintenance

-Government Center and First Street Center Facilities

-Parking Lots

-Outgrowth of Environmental Services Building

c. Increased risk of limiting flexibility and innovation in addressing gaps and opportunities

- When funding opportunities to advance master plan items
- When funding high impact opportunities (like 1st county in state full fiber access)
- When addressing known gaps in providing competitive staff health care coverage
- When absorbing unfunded state or federal mandates
- When planning for surplus generating activities to offset inflation and tax pressures
- When planning for libraries to meet the growing needs of our community
- When accelerating needed services (example: emergency mental health impacting youth, elderly and the most vulnerable)

d. Avoidable pressures on levy

- With bonding dollars scheduled to come off in the next 7 years, we should be in a position to return a portion to taxpayers in the form of tax reductions.
- We give ourselves few options, one being significantly raising levy. We need look no further than one of the largest cities in the county what can happen when deferred maintenance comes to a head – a 20.07% tax levy increase in 2023 (and sizable increase expected in 2024).

If we prioritize long term vision, planning and budgeting these concerns can be met head on with workable suggested solutions (and validated in other communities), including:

- Exploring areas to generate surplus without competing with the private sector** (vs. traditional cuts we're seeing more and more of across school districts, cities and counties). These areas might include cabin rentals, enhanced sledding hill experience, restoring non-resident fees, paid naming rights on tasteful elements like pavers and sitting rocks, etc.)
- Exploring a path to accelerate expanded commercial tax base** (with a possible commerce overlay to compliment 212 and 5 expansion investments to lessen the tax burden on residents
- Exploring reassigning levy dollars from non-mandated operations** that are or can be sustainable and profitable without ongoing taxpayer investment
- Selling unused and underutilized county assets** (vehicles, property, etc.) to right size our holdings and the associated carrying costs
- Exploring community appetite for a county wide parks referendum** to let voters decide if parks, trails and lakes are worth dedicated investment (perhaps one referendum to serve county, city and township)
- Exploring more intentional staff investment** particularly in overall culture, benchmarking and having clear performance metrics for employee engagement, manager development, turnover reduction, etc.
- Exploring redeploying excess capacity and preparing for challenging workforce headwinds** through capturing work from home efficiencies and output, being intentional as our county grows to be more in line with peer counties (estimated 7.1 employees per 1,000 population in Carver County in 2019 vs. estimated 5.7/1,000 in peer counties), and preparing for workforce shortages for the foreseeable future.

We get the opportunity to help shape and lead the future of Carver County – I believe the next 20 years shape the next 200 years. I'd urge my fellow peers to restore board operating rules and resist kicking the can further by tackling these challenges head on with vision and solutions.

Onwards,



Matt Udermann

For reference:

December 20, 2023; Closed Board Work

Session <https://www.carvercountymn.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/24166/638066968522870000>

Meeting Video: This was an unrecorded session

January 3, 2023 Organizational Session

Agenda: <https://www.carvercountymn.gov/home/showdocument?id=24198>

Meeting Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaJq1jTm5XA> (at 13:30 – 25:00)

March 21, 2023 Board Session

Specifically, proposed consent items 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10

<https://www.carvercountymn.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/24606/638145708269970000>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uea6XRqHPVk>, starting at 16:30

April 4, 2023 Board Session

Specifically, proposed consent items 5.11, 5.12, 5.13

<https://www.carvercountymn.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/24692/638157713203030000>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44ajynbN4IE>, starting at 6:20

Note: Board Operating Rules for Reference:

<https://www.carvercountymn.gov/home/showdocument?id=24198>