

## County Council votes to “unappropriate” economic development funds

Written by

Thursday, 11 June 2009 00:00 - Last Updated Thursday, 11 June 2009 10:47

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The Washington County Council met in regular session on Monday, June 1, with all members presents. The minutes of previous meetings and all claims were approved unanimously.

In a 6-1 vote, the County Council voted to reverse its decision appropriating approximately \$75,000 from the Economic Development Income Tax Fund (EDIT); Jim Nice casted the dissenting vote. Concerns were raised that a recent decision by the County Commissioners to give the Washington County Chamber of Commerce \$10,000 to cover its operating budget for the remainder of the year violated the spirit of the initial agreement between the Council and the Commissioners when the earmark was approved late in 2008. That agreement was to set aside 25 per cent of the annual funds generated by EDIT for unspecified non-roadwork economic development projects.

At the May 20 meeting when the Commissioners voted to approved the Chamber's request, County Council Vice-President John Fultz was present and gave enthusiastic support for the Commissioners' action saying, “The Chamber's work is an important part of economic development in the county. We need a strong Chamber of Commerce.” Apparently, no Council member other than Fultz was made aware of the money being given to the Chamber prior to the decision being made to do so.

It should be noted that over the last four years, elected officials approved a similar requests from the Chamber to cover shortfalls in the operating budget equal to approximately \$11,000. Council members expressed support for the Chamber and its mission but regretted the manner in which the request was handled considering last year's agreement. The move to “unappropriate” the remaining \$52,500 in earmarked funds will require that both the Chamber and the Commissioners formally approve any requests from those funds from this point forward unless a resolution can be reached.

Thus far, three requests for funding have been approved from the funds in question: \$10K for engineering fees required to quality for stimulus package funding for infrastructure, \$2.5K for an income survey needed to qualify for a grant to pay for the development of a land use plan and \$10K for the Chamber of Commerce.

According to Washington County Economic Growth Partnership President Jess Helsel, representatives of his organization, the Chamber of Commerce and the Tourism Board have met several times recently and are close to having a comprehensive economic development plan to present to both the Council and the Commissioners. Earlier this year, Council President Mark Manship challenged the three groups to work jointly on such a proposal for the use of the earmarked funds. That proposal, if approved, by the Council and the Commissioners would be part of the Economic Development Plan submitted to the State of Indiana for this fiscal year.

In other business, the Council took the following action:

Tabling a request by Jon Kuss to reinstate \$7000 cut from the 2009 budget request for Hoosier Hills Pact.

Announced receipt of Form 1782 (2009 budget approval from state) and notation of specific budgets being cut by the state due to decrease in projected revenues. The following funds were reduced: Highway—\$333,140; Local Roads and Streets--\$69,089; Park and Recreation--\$25,177.

Receipt of Report of Collections for May from Chris Strange

Appointment of Mark Clark and John Fultz to sub-committee developing options for Emergency Medical Service.

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With no further business to conduct, the Council adjourned until its next regularly scheduled meeting on July 6.