

Budget Message from District 4 Commissioner Steve Bradshaw

February 27, 2017

Dear Friends:

This is to inform you that in tomorrow's Board of Commissioners (BOC) meeting I intend to vote YES to approve the 2017 Budget as proposed by CEO Michael Thurmond. Like all budgets this one is imperfect. But, in the near term I think it makes a good faith effort to address basic needs without radically deviating from recent precedent.

I am cognizant of the fact that this budget cycle has had some interesting dynamics. Specifically, three CEOs (May, Ellis & Thurmond) had input on this process which is unusual to say the least.

Additionally, because of the change of administrations the BOC received the budget in mid-January rather than mid-December as is the normal process. This means that we had one month less to digest and deliberate over the various proposals contained within. Considering that our total budget is over \$1.3 billion, the loss of an entire month to consider it is significant.

The department budget briefings that my BOC colleagues and I have held over the past few weeks have been informative. I have also held a number of one-on-one meetings with various department heads. My major takeaway has been that multiple departments expressed some sort of pressing need that will require additional funding to address.

Moreover, there is the nagging issue of the alleged structural tax funds deficit of \$25 million. According to our budget director, a more accurate terminology to describe the situation is a budgeted use of funds balance. Either way, the fact remains that we have less budgeted revenues than our expected expenditures for 2017. While this scenario is apparently nothing new and we have managed through it in the past this way of operating strikes me as unsustainable.

However, rather than voting NO on this budget as something that is out of whack with recent precedent or making some sort of radical proposals, I plan to take the posture of living to fight another day. We will have the opportunity to make course corrections as needed with our mid-year budget review in June. Additionally, we must keep in mind that this budget, and any future budgets must be viewed and dealt with in a much larger context.

The sands in DeKalb County have been shifting for quite some time. Continued cityhood incorporations and annexations proceed like it is the "wild, wild west" with everyone essentially grabbing what they want. This makes planning at all levels more challenging. Even so, the fact remains that an entity known as DeKalb County will continue in some shape or form with obligations that must continue to be met.

CEO Thurmond has been in office for the same number of days that I have been in office which is 58 days. Frankly, I would like more time to properly deliberate on the challenges that lie ahead and the inevitable budget implications which will flow from that process. I think the new CEO should be afforded the same consideration.

For me, the bottom line is sooner or later we, the Governing Authority of DeKalb County (CEO and BOC) need to answer some threshold questions: *What kind of county will we be going forward? What services will we continue to provide and at what levels? What is the proper level of taxation to adequately fund our service delivery? What services will we disengage from? How will we be fiscally responsible? What will be the nature of our relationships and agreements with the various municipalities?*

All of these questions should be addressed in a systematic and deliberative way that recognizes various points of view. The citizens of DeKalb County should be fully engaged in this process. Simply stated this will not occur before we vote tomorrow. This is why I have taken the position that I articulated in the first sentence of this memo.

However, it must be stated that this reckoning has been postponed for far too long. The tough choices that we need to make as a Governing Authority and as citizens have been put off for years. I believe that we should fully engage this state of affairs this year and act accordingly.

My priorities remain the same as the priorities that I ran on: *Public Safety, Code Enforcement, and Business Development.*

I welcome your feedback as always. Thanks for your consideration. It is truly an honor to serve.

Stephen R. Bradshaw

DeKalb County Commissioner, District 4

Decatur, GA

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