

Municipal

Summer 2006

Research News

Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington



What's Inside

New Payroll Deduction Rules	4
Ask MRSC	6
Just for Fun	7
Heads Up	8
Whoa! Budget Again ... or Still?	10
New Acquisitions	11
Ask MRSC E-newsletter	12

Ethics in Government *Getting the Word Out*

By Sue Enger, Planning Consultant, Municipal Research and Services Center

Opinion polls and a growing docket of initiatives indicate that citizens do not feel that local officials listen to them, or that they have significant influence on community decisions. Government officials may need new tools for better gauging and understanding the preferences and needs of constituents in increasingly diverse communities. Polls also indicate that the average citizen is acutely aware of government shortcomings, but far less conscious of the day-to-day benefits government provides. The message about government failures has been more vigorously promoted than the story of its successes and of the services it offers. Cities and counties need to be more vocal about the value of government and the mutual responsibility of all citizens to make it work.

Our communities are increasingly made up of diverse groups that have diverse interests and that obtain information in different ways. The most effective community involvement programs use a combination of approaches to reach a cross section of citizens. A rapidly changing world and new technology offer new opportunities for quick and cost-effective ways to get out information. Busy schedules mean that citizens will appreciate convenient, comfortable, and quick ways to stay informed about government services and community issues. Citizens may also enjoy combining the

responsibility of staying informed with the opportunity for social interaction and even a little fun! Local governments should make an effort to get out information about accomplishments as well as what's going on.

We are including here a few examples of local government approaches for "getting the word out." You may see additional examples on our web page at www.mrsc.org/Subjects/Governance/Participation/Effective.aspx.

Convenient, Comfortable Settings and Informal Meeting Formats

Bellevue Crossroads Mini City Hall – The Crossroads Mini City Hall is a neighborhood-based customer service center, offering personal assistance, information, and referral to the people of Bellevue's most diverse and densely populated neighborhood. Located inside Crossroads Shopping Center, the facility emphasizes quality customer service as well as outreach and education programs specific to community needs. The service center is a fully-equipped satellite office, staffed by a coordinator and community volunteers from 10:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday. They have volunteer interpreters/translators in Armenian, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu who provide services at various times during the

continued on page 3

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week. See www.ci.bellevue.wa.us/page.asp?view=3103.

Speakers Bureaus and Presentations to Existing Groups

Clark County Speakers Bureau – The speakers bureau program offers experienced, informative speakers ready to talk with citizens about important county issues and projects. The web site lists speakers by topic or by department. The topics list covers topics from animals to youth and includes subjects as diverse as domestic violence, the Endangered Species Act, noxious plants, and voting, to name just a few. See www.clark.wa.gov/speakers/index.html.

Reaching Citizens Through Technology

Yakima Community Television (YCTV) and Yakima Public Affairs Channel (Y-PAC) – YCTV is Yakima's Public Access TV channel. Community members can learn how to produce TV programs at the YCTV production facility and then see their finished programs air. The diversity of YCTV programs mirrors the diversity of thought, philosophy, culture, and interests of the Yakima area. The web site provides information on how a citizen may produce his/her own TV show.

Y-PAC is Yakima's Government Access TV channel. Y-PAC provides unedited local public affairs events and issues. The election coverage includes interviews with candidates, issues forums, and live election night coverage. See www.ci.yakima.wa.us/services/yctv/.

Reaching Citizens Through Web sites

Scottsdale, Arizona, Citizen and Neighborhood Resources – This web page contains useful information geared to residents with the purpose of creating collaborative relationships and partnerships among citizens, groups, and local government.

The Citizen and Neighborhood Resources is a service department for citizens, with services that include code enforcement, outreach, education, communication, and customer service

on a variety of levels. The department works primarily out in the community to communicate with citizens to understand their needs, and then takes that information back to the city government to improve all city services.

One of this department's programs is the Neighborhood Notification Program. Once a neighborhood is registered with the city, a designated neighborhood contact will receive direct, accurate, and timely information about projects or issues affecting that neighborhood. With this information, the neighbors may participate effectively in providing input to the city on projects and issues from a neighborhood perspective. See www.scottsdaleaz.gov/departments/deptDetail.asp?deptID=29.

Citizen Guides, Brochures and Orientations

Citizen Participation Guide, Clark County WA – This web site stresses the importance of citizen involvement in striking a balance between the interests of the community as a whole and those who have a special stake in a particular issue. It encourages citizens to become actively involved in their government so that decisions can better reflect the will of the people. This site offers a concise guide on how citizens may participate in shaping government policies, programs, and decisions and where to get pertinent information. See www.clark.wa.gov/citizen-guide/index.html.

Newsletters, Newspaper Columns, Flyers, Displays and Media Campaigns

"City Currents Newsletter," Des Moines, WA – The newsletter is available in both print and electronic form. Their web page provides current newsletter information and the ability to search past newsletters. See <http://66.175.4.144/artman/publish/>.

Civic Education for Youth

Kidsville - City of Rockville, MD – These kid-friendly web pages are designed to educate kids about their local government, the environment, and

the community. See www.rockvillemd.gov/residents/kidsville/homepage.html.

Citizen Education

Citizen Academy (Police) – Renton, WA. This free academy is designed to educate Renton residents and business merchants in how their police department operates. Included in the academy are an optional ride-along with a patrol officer, tours of the 911 dispatch center, police department, and jail. A variety of classes are offered, including classes in bike patrol, animal control, K-9 units, local gangs, narcotics investigations, use of force, and many others. See www.ci.renton.wa.us/police/citacad.htm.

Effective communication and citizen involvement entail more than just "getting the word out." Also important is getting feedback from your citizens on "how you are doing," involving citizens in community improvements, communicating about government spending so citizens know "what they are getting for their money," and communicating about available government services so citizens know "what's in it for them." For information on these subjects and more, see our web page at www.mrsc.org/Subjects/Governance/Participation/Participation.aspx.

Keeping citizens informed about local government issues and encouraging them to become actively involved will help make government more of a partnership. This partnership will hopefully build greater understanding and trust between local governments and the citizens they serve. ▀

Sue Enger, senger@mrsc.org

Make Sure Your Agency is in Compliance with New Payroll Deduction Rules

By Bruce Schroeder, Employment/Litigation Attorney, Summit Law Group, PLLC

As experienced personnel managers know all too well, running afoul of laws protecting employee wages (even inadvertently) can subject an employer to liability for damages and attorney fees. Understanding the rules governing employee wages is therefore critical. In late November of last year, the Department of Labor and Industries changed these rules to some extent by issuing several new regulations addressing an employer's ability to make deductions from employees' pay. The new rules, which went into effect January 1, 2006, address the situations in which an employer can make deductions from an employee's final paycheck upon termination and during ongoing employment (a third new regulation addresses the recoupment of overpayments to an employee, but is applicable only to private sector employers). Because they are more complex and detailed than the prior regulatory guidance, employers should review their payroll practices and policies to ensure compliance with the new rules.

Deductions from Final Wages (WAC 296-126-025)

The new rule regarding deductions from final paychecks addresses when an employee must give permission for a deduction, and when a deduction is allowed to reduce an employee's wages below the minimum wage.

Permissible Deductions Without

Employee Agreement: In the following situations, an employer may deduct from an employee's final wages without the employee's permission, and even where the deduction causes the final gross wages to go below the state minimum wage:

- Where the deduction is required by state or federal law;
- Where the deduction is for medical, surgical or hospital care or service, provided that the services are not covered by workers com-

pensation (note: this provision is for actual medical costs; deductions for insurance are addressed below and must be authorized in writing by the employee);

- Where the deduction is to satisfy a court order, judgment, wage attachment, trustee process, bankruptcy proceeding, or payroll deduction notice for child support payments.

Permissible Deductions With Employee Agreement:

In the following situations, an employer may deduct from an employee's final wages if the employee has given written or oral permission, and even where the deduction causes the final gross wages to go below the state minimum wage:

- For pension, medical, dental or other benefit plans when such agreements have been specifically agreed upon orally or in writing in advance by the employee and employer;
- For a payment to a creditor or third party if the employee authorizes it orally or in writing in advance to pay a sum for the benefit of the employee. The regulation clarifies that a "creditor" may be the employer, such that deductions for the repayment of a loan would be permitted if authorized by the employee.

Note: Although the regulation provides that the employee's permission can be written or oral, it will be the employer's burden to establish that the employee agreed to a particular deduction. It is therefore advisable to get any authorization for a payroll deduction in writing.

Other Permissible Deductions, As Long As Deduction Will Not Reduce Pay Below The Minimum Wage:

An employer may deduct from an employee's final wages without the employee's permission in the following circumstances as long as: (1) the deduction does

not reduce the employee's final gross wages below the minimum wage; and (2) the incident that is the basis for the deduction occurred during the final pay period:

- For acceptance of a bad check or credit card in violation of procedures that the employer previously made known to the employee;
- For any cash shortage from a cash register, drawer or portable depository if the employee had sole access to the cash and participated in the cash accounting at the beginning and end of his/her shift;
- For any cash shortage, customer walkout, breakage or loss of equipment if caused by a dishonest or willful act by the employee;
- For employee theft if the employer can show that the employee's intent was to deprive and if the employer filed a police report.

Deductions During Ongoing Employment (WAC 296-126-028)

Permissible Deductions Without Employee Agreement:

As is true for final paychecks, an employer may deduct from an employee's paycheck during ongoing employment without the employee's permission, and even where the deduction causes the employee's wages to go below the state minimum wage in the following situations:

- Where the deduction is required by state or federal law;
- Where the deduction is for medical, surgical or hospital care or service, provided that the services are not covered by workers' compensation (note: this provision is for actual medical costs; deductions for insurance are addressed below and must be authorized in writing by the employee);
- Where the deduction is to satisfy a court order, judgment, wage attachment, trustee process, bankruptcy proceeding, or payroll

deduction notice for child support payments.

Other Permissible Deductions: An employer may deduct from an employee's paycheck in other situations only where the employee "expressly authorizes the deduction in writing and in advance for a lawful purpose for the benefit of the employee." Such deductions are permitted even if the deduction puts the employee's wages below the minimum wages. Examples of deductions permitted under this provision include deductions to repay a loan the employer made to the employee, and deductions for monthly pension, medical, dental or other benefit plans.

Adjustments for Overpayments

While the Department of Labor & Industries also promulgated a new

rule addressing the recoupment of wage overpayments, this new rule is applicable only to private sector employers. For public employers, wage overpayments are governed by preexisting statutes, RCW 49.48.200 and 49.48.210, which specify the steps a public entity must follow to recover wage overpayment to employees. In a nutshell, those statutes require a public employer to provide written notice to the employee, via certified mail, specifying the amount of the overpayment, the basis for the claim, a demand for payment within twenty calendar days of the date on which the employee received the notice, and the rights of the employee under RCW 49.48. RCW 49.48.210 affords the public employee certain procedural rights to challenge the employer's claim of overpayment. Once the employer's right to recoup an overpayment is

established, RCW 49.48.200 provides that the public employer can recover the overpayment via deduction from an employee's wages provided that each deduction shall not exceed (absent other agreement between employer and employee): (a) five percent of the employee's disposable earnings in a pay period other than the final pay period; or (b) the amount still outstanding from the employee's disposable earnings in the final pay period.

Public employers who discover a wage overpayment should carefully review the requirements of RCW 48.49.200 and .210 to ensure that all of the statutory requirements are followed under the particular facts. ▀

Bruce Schroeder is an employment / litigation attorney with Summit Law Group in Seattle, WA. His practice is concentrated on representing management in the entire range of employment law matters. This article was taken from the "HR Advisor" column that appears on the MRSC web site. A new article appears each month with timely HR management information and advice.

MRSC PRESENTS PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

SUSPENSE

ACTION

EXCITEMENT

THRILLS

ROMANCE - NO, NOT REALLY

FACTS

COMING TO A CITY OR TOWN NEAR YOU

JULY 2006

Ask MRSC

Summaries of recent inquiries answered by MRSC consultants

Gambling Tax – May a city differentiate in the gambling tax rate for punchboards and pull-tabs between commercial businesses and nonprofit organizations?

Yes, this is clearly authorized in RCW 9.46.110(3)(e). That statute provides that taxation of punchboards and pull-tabs for charitable or nonprofit organizations is based on gross receipts from the operation of the games less the amount awarded as cash or merchandise prizes, and shall not exceed a rate of ten percent.

In regard to commercial operators, the tax may be based on gross receipts from the operation of the games and may not exceed a rate of five percent, or may be based on gross receipts from the operation of the games less the amount awarded as prizes and may not exceed a rate of ten percent.

Interlocal Agreements – What is the effective date for the new legislation allowing the posting of interlocal agreements on the web?

The 2006 legislature in Chapter 32, Laws of 2006 (HB 2676) amended RCW 39.34.040 to add the underlined language below:

Prior to its entry into force, an agreement made pursuant to this chapter shall be filed with the county auditor or, alternatively, listed by subject on a public agency's web site or other electronically retrievable public source.

The effective date is June 7, 2006.

Mayor Pro Tem – May another councilmember in a code city be appointed as an alternate mayor pro tem if both the mayor and mayor pro tem are absent?

Yes, this is specifically authorized by RCW 35A.12.065. This statute provides that, in the absence of the mayor

and mayor pro tem, the council can appoint any qualified person to serve as mayor pro tem in the absence or temporary disability of the mayor.

Public Disclosure – Are records of driving under the influence (DUI) breath and blood tests exempt from public disclosure?

See RCW 70.02.010(4), (6) & (7), which define “health care,” “health care information,” and “health care provider.” Under those definitions, it is clear that records of a breath test administered by a trained police officer are not “health care information” that is prohibited from disclosure under RCW 70.02.020(1).

Because blood drawn for a blood alcohol test must always be done by a “health care provider,” records of blood tests are “health care information” and are prohibited from public disclosure. However, if a person is requesting the records for research purposes, the records can be released with the names redacted because then the records cannot be associated with the identity of any particular person. See the definition of “health care information” at RCW 70.02.010(7).

Public Records – Do cities and counties have an obligation under public records law to provide records that will be filed with or created by the city or county in the future?

No. As stated in WAC 44-14-04004(4)(a), which is part of the “Model Rules for Public Records” adopted by the Washington State Attorney General’s Office:

An agency must only provide access to public records in existence at the time of the request. An agency is not obligated to supplement responses. Therefore, if a public record is created or comes into the possession of the agency after the request is received by the

agency, it is not responsive to the request and need not be provided. A requestor must make a new request to obtain subsequently created public records.

See also, *Smith v. Okanogan County*, 100 Wn. App. 7, 14 (2000), holding that “an agency is not required to create a record which is otherwise nonexistent.”

Public Records – May a public records request be satisfied by directing the inquirer to a link on a web site?

The “Model Rules for Public Records” adopted by the Washington State Attorney General’s Office state that an agency can provide access to public records by posting them on its web site. If the requestor does not have internet access, the agency may provide access to the record by allowing the requestor to view the record on a specific computer terminal at the agency open to the public. WAC 44-14-03004. Despite the availability of the record on the agency web site, a requestor can still make a public records request and inspect the record or obtain a copy of it by paying the appropriate per-page copying charge.

Records Retention – How long must building permit records be kept?

The records concerning permit application and approval need to be kept only until completion of the project or issuance of a certificate of occupancy. However, the actual building permit, project inspection records, certificate of occupancy, and records concerning administrative decisions, legal actions, variances and special conditions must be kept for the life of the building, plus six years. This data is located in the *General Records Retention Schedules for All Local Government Agencies*, which can be viewed at www.secstate.wa.gov/archives/pdf/LOCAL%20GOV%2012%202002.pdf. (See “Records Category: Land Use

Planning, Permits, and Appeals” beginning on page S-118.)

Signing Bonus – May a city or county pay a “signing bonus,” in the form of a cash payment, to a new employee?

It is our opinion a jurisdiction could do this if the hiring bonus was authorized in a policy and money was budgeted for it.

This is not a gift of public funds because there is consideration being received by the jurisdiction in the form of a new employee agreeing to work for it. So, it is a policy decision as to whether such a bonus is offered.▶

How to “Ask MRSC.” Assistance from MRSC may be obtained by **Phone** (206) 625-1300 or 1-800-933-6772 for long-distance calls; **Letter** 2601 4th Avenue, Suite 800, Seattle, WA, 98121-1280; **Fax** (206) 625-1220; or **E-mail** mrsc@mrsc.org. Telephone inquiry service is available from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. If a consultant is not immediately available, you can record a detailed request on voice mail 24-hours a day, and a staff member will call back as soon as possible.

Just for Fun

City Slogans

Match the city with the correct slogan and stats:

Yakima, Algona, Colville, Fairfield, Des Moines, Tacoma, Wenatchee, Benton City, Spokane, Mossyrock

1. *City of Proud Heritage*, City of _____, Stevens County, (Second Class City, Mayor-Council)
2. *The Waterland City*, City of _____, King County, (Code City, Council-Manager)
3. *The Town that Celebrates Flag Day*, Town of _____, Spokane County, (Town, Mayor-Council)
4. *The Heart of Lewis County*, City of _____, Lewis County, (Code City, Mayor-Council)
5. *Near Nature, Near Perfect*, City of _____, Spokane County, (First Class City, Mayor-Council)
6. *City of the Great Blue Heron*, City of _____, King County, (Code City, Mayor-Council)
7. *Bent On Progress*, City of _____, Benton County, (Code City, Mayor-Council)
8. *The Apple Capital of the World*, City of _____, Chelan County, (Code City, Mayor-Council)

Answers: (1) Colville (2) Des Moines (3) Fairfield (4) Mossyrock (5) Spokane (6) Algona (7) Benton City (8) Wenatchee

If you have a city slogan you would like to submit to us, please contact Amanda at (206) 625-1300 or akemp@mrsc.org.

State Parks for Summer Fun

Summer is near. Do you know in which counties you can find these state parks?

Kittitas, King, Okanogan, Thurston, Skagit, Jefferson, Ferry, Columbia

1. For fishing, swimming, boating: Alta Lake State Park, _____ County (Located four miles southwest of Pateros on Highway 153, central Washington.) www.parks.wa.gov/parkpage.asp?selectedpark=Alta%20Lake
2. For swimming, sailboarding, shellfish, and a family campground: Bay View State Park, _____ County (Located seven miles west of Burlington and 14 miles east of Anacortes, in the northwest part of the state.) www.parks.wa.gov/parkpage.asp?selectedpark=Bay%20View

continued on page 9

Heads Up

Emerging information for local government

Creating Inclusive Communities

In recent years, many Washington communities have seen an influx of immigrants from many countries.

Because they have diverse cultural backgrounds and special needs, integrating them into our communities can offer quite a challenge.

A 2004 Brookings Institute article, *The Rise of New Immigration Gateways*, by Audrey Singer, suggests that community and government leaders use the following major approaches to ease immigrants' incorporation into their new communities: understand local immigration dynamics, bring cultural and language sensitivity to service delivery, build English language capacity, provide workforce support, create linkages to mainstream institutions, and encourage civic engagement.

There are many partnerships and innovative techniques being used by our local governments as they create inclusive communities. A few reference sources and a sampling of program descriptions have been assembled here to illustrate some of the approaches being taken. This information will be expanded and incorporated into an MRSC web page on "Creating Inclusive Communities."

Background Reading

- *Building Inclusive Communities Action Guide*, League of Minnesota Cities Cultural Diversity Task Force www.lmnc.org/services/bicinitiative.cfm
- *Building Inclusive Communities: A User Friendly Handbook for Those Who Care About Self and Others*, by Pamala V. Morris, *Journal of Extension*, June 2002 www.joe.org/joe/2002june/tt1.html. This is a review of a manual, *Working with Differences in Communities: A handbook for those who care about creative inclusive communities*, by Ann C. Schaubert, Oregon State University Extension Service,

Manual 13, March 2002. This manual is now available on loan from the MRSC Library.

- *Lost in Translation Limited English Proficient Populations and the Police*, By Bharathi A. Venkatraman, Attorney, Civil Rights Division Coordination and Review Section, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C., *Police Chief*, April 2006. <http://policechiefmagazine.org/>

Web Resources

- *The Association of Washington Cities' Diversity Home Page* represents a snapshot of cultural diversity issues, actions, and resources available to and from Washington cities. AWC's "Diversity Champion Awards" recognize city efforts that celebrate diversity, provide leadership and empowerment in meeting the challenges of potential conflict, and demonstrate collaboration with all members of the community in improving the living, working, educational, social, and economic environments of their communities. Select "Diversity" from the "Key Issues" tab on AWC's home page at www.awcnet.org.
- *National League of Cities Partnership for Working Toward Inclusive Communities*
The partnership unites city leaders working to create communities that include all members and who celebrate the diversity of race, religion, gender, ability, and culture in order to build communities that accept and represent the differences among their citizens. Increased citizen participation, engagement, and the promotion of equal opportunity and fairness are the hallmarks of inclusive communities. The NLC web site offers a tool kit for program participation and other related publications. www.nlc.org/resources_for_cities/

[programs__services/7952.cfm](http://www.mrsc.org/programs__services/7952.cfm)

- *EthnoMed* is a joint project of the University of Washington Health Sciences Library and Harborview Medical Center's "Community House Calls Program." EthnoMed provides medical and cultural information relating to immigrant and refugee groups. While the information is specific to groups in the Seattle area, much of the cultural and health information is of interest and applicable to other geographic areas. The site is designed to bridge cultural and language barriers during medical visits. The information about culture, language, health, illness, and community resources would also be useful background for those designing social, health, and other human service programs for ethnic groups. www.ethnomed.org/
- *WebJunction Spanish Language Outreach Program* helps equip local library staff with knowledge and resources to reach out to Spanish-speaking members of their communities and to increase their access to technology. While the focus is libraries, the information is applicable to other outreach programs. www.webjunction.org/do/Navigation?category=10555

Program Illustrations (See AWC's "Diversity Champion Awards" for a listing of award programs www.awcnet.org.)

- **Bellevue** – In 2003, the city created a Spanish web site, "La Pagina de Internet de la Ciudad de Bellevue." The site was launched to help Latino residents with limited or no English-speaking skills find the information, resources, and assistance needed to integrate into the community and to provide a better understanding of how Bellevue city and government systems function. www.ci.bellevue.wa.us/page.asp?view=22990.

- **Lynnwood** – The Neighborhood and Demographic Diversity Advisory Commission, formed in 2005, is an advisory body whose duties are to monitor demographic trends in the city and to identify and recommend to the mayor and city council ways to encourage community understanding of the increasing demographic diversity in Lynnwood. www.ci.lynnwood.wa.us/Content/CityHall.aspx?id=522
- **Redmond** – An article in the winter issue of *Focus on Redmond*, titled *Redmond's Diversity*, outlines the various educational, social, cultural, and religious programs, both government and private, available to its growing multi-cultural community. With more than 55 languages spoken in the area, the city treats diversity as a central issue of concern and opportunity. The city of Redmond is responding with programs that foster understanding, equal employment opportunity, educational awareness, outreach to people with disabilities, language translation, and culturally diverse performances and classes. www.mrsc.org/artdoc/misc/R42FocusW05Diversity.pdf

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Just for Fun continued from page 7

3. For gold mining, boating, skiing, fishing, hiking: Curlew Lake State Park, _____ County (Located eight miles north of Republic, in north-east Washington.)
www.parks.wa.gov/parkpage.asp?selectedpark=Curlew%20Lake
4. For clamming, oyster gathering, fishing: Dosewallips State Park, _____ County (Located on the shore of Hood Canal in western Washington.)
www.parks.wa.gov/parkpage.asp?selectedpark=Dosewallips&pageno=1
5. For picnicking, fishing, kayaking, rafting, and a geyser: Flaming Geyser State Park, _____ County (Located between Auburn and Black Diamond on the state's western side.)
www.parks.wa.gov/parkpage.asp?selectedpark=Flaming%20Geyser
6. For trails and summer campfire programs celebrating the Lewis and Clark Expedition: Lewis and Clark Trail State Park, _____ County (Located 25 miles northeast of Walla Walla in the southeastern corner of the state.)
www.parks.wa.gov/parkpage.asp?selectedpark=Lewis%20%26%20Clark%20Trail
7. For reefs for scuba diving and a view of the Puget Sound: Tolmie State Park, _____ County (Located eight miles northeast of Olympia, in western Washington.)
www.parks.wa.gov/parkpage.asp?selectedpark=Tolmie&pageno=1
8. For camping, hiking, picnicking, waterskiing, fishing: Ginkgo Petrified Forest State Park, _____ County (Located approximately 30 miles east of Ellensburg on the Columbia River, in central Washington.)
www.parks.wa.gov/parkpage.asp?selectedpark=Ginkgo+Petrified+Forest%2FWanapum+Recreational+Area

Answers: (1) Okanogan (2) Skagit (3) Ferry (4) Jefferson (5) King (6) Columbia (7) Thurston (8) Kittitas

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Whoa! Budget Again ... or Still??

By Gayla Gjertsen, Finance Director, City of Tumwater

Yes, now is the perfect time to start thinking about your 2007 budget. Why? You should be planning your annual retreat about now, and that is the perfect time to think about where you want to go and how you plan to get there. This is the time for the legislative body, along with the executive branch of your organization, to take the reins for the beginning of the budget process and start talking about "broad goals." If you have a retreat, does your agenda look like any other meeting or work session? That is not what you should be doing at this session. This retreat or planning session only happens once a year, so it is important to use this time to "re-discover" and/or "re-validate" where you're headed and how you're going to get there.

The legislative body's primary role in the budget process is to establish the organization's broad goals. These broad goals provide the overall direction for your organization and serve as the basis for developing all your policies, programs and program levels, capital construction and improvements, and possibly even maintenance levels. Many can get stuck on how to determine what their broad goals are. One way to get started is to pull out all those long-term planning documents that you have already worked so rigor-

ously on, such as the comprehensive land use plan, transportation plan, and utilities (water, sewer, storm sewer) plans. Also, look at your police and/or fire master plans, and, even historical district, downtown, and economic development plans, if you have them. You may even have others. All these plans typically have priorities, desired service levels, and/or vision statements. Get all of them laid out and have staff compile a master list of your primary goals. One of your challenges in doing this is to deal with the conflicts that inevitably arise among competing goals. You need to resolve these conflicts in order to set a clear direction for the achievement of your overall goals.

The most important thing in this exercise is to think strategically. In other words, don't get bogged down in the details. Try to get agreement on a small number of broad goals. These written goals should address the most critical issues facing the community. Defining priorities among competing goals will also improve their usefulness in allocating resources. An example of a goal could be:

Public Safety: Develop standards of service for police and fire and ensure that police and fire services are maintained as top priority

services, including adequate funding for staffing, for operating budgets, and capital requirements. (Colorado Springs, Colorado)

There are many other examples of broad goals out there, and, certainly, you can use those to assist you in your exercise, but, of course, these need to be tailored to fit your own organization's issues, values, and financial resources. One potential resource for sample goal statements is the Government Finance Officer's Association's "Budget Practices" web page www.gfoa.org/services/nacslb/.

Once you have set and prioritized your broad goals, staff can then use that information to establish the logical links between authorized spending levels and your goals. We often hear the complaint that legislative bodies don't have a role in the budget process. Now you know you have the most important role. You are the primary architects of this project and without your leadership, we really don't know what we're building. ▀

Gayla L. Gjertsen has been the Finance Director for the city of Tumwater for over 15 years and was previously the Director of Administration for the city of Milton. She has served as president of the Washington Finance Officer's Association and has been a presenter at the annual Budget and Fiscal Management Workshops held each summer. This article was taken from the "Finance Advisor" column that appears on the MRSC web site. A new article appears each month with timely local government finance information and advice.

New Acquisitions

New resource materials now available

This list contains new publications, ordinances, and other materials recently received by the MRSC library. We also prepare a more comprehensive list of new acquisitions each month which is posted on our Web site at www.mrsc.org/library/newacq.htm. If you would like to borrow one or more of these publications, please contact Peter Breen in our library at (206) 625-1300 or library@mrsc.org.

Construction

Green Office Buildings: A Practical Guide to Development, Ann Frej, et al, Washington, DC: ULI-the Urban Land Institute, 2005, x, 366 p.: ill. (C 5.1700 G74 2005)

Economic Development

An Elected Official's Guide to Economic Development, Judd Metzgar, Chicago, IL: Government Finance Officers Association, 2005, vi, 61 p. cm. (ED 0.0009 E44 2005**)

Energy Conservation

The Long Emergency: Surviving the Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-First Century, James Howard Kunstler, 1st ed. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005, vii, 307 p. (EC 2.2000 L65 2005)

Finance

Request for Proposal: A Guide to Effective RFP Development, Bud Porter-Roth. Boston: Addison-Wesley, c2002, xxii, 307 p.: ill. (F 8.8100 R45 2002)

Governance

Knowing the Territory: Basic Legal Guidelines for Washington City and County Officials, Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington (MRSC), 8th ed. (G 0.0000 M855r no.47)

Libraries

The Digital Challenge for Libraries: Understanding the Culture and Technology of Total Information, Ralph Blanchard. (LIB 5.0000 D54 2005)

Planning

Smart growth shareware [computer file], Washington, DC: Smart Growth America, 2005, 1 CD-ROM, col., 4 3/4 in. (PL 8.6270 S52 2005 CD)

Smart Communities: How Citizens and Local Leaders Can Use Strategic Thinking to Build a Brighter Future, Suzanne W. Morse. (PL 4.0000 S63 2004)

Zoned Out: Regulation, Markets, and Choices in Transportation and Metropolitan Land-Use, Jonathan Levine. (PL 5.2500 Z65 2005)

Creating Walkable Places: Compact Mixed Use Solutions, Adrienne Schmitz and Jason Scully. (PL 10.4100 C74 2005)

Travel by Design: The Influence of Urban Form on Travel, Marlon G. Boarnet and Randall Crane, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. (PL 5.2500 T83 2005)

Placemaking on a Budget: Improving Small Towns, Neighborhoods, and Downtowns without Spending a Lot of Money, Al Zelinka and Susan Jackson Harden, Chicago: American Planning Association, 2005, xii, 133 p. (PL 14.0000 P53 2005)

Public Works

Standard Specifications for Public Works Construction, written and promulgated by Public Works Standards, Inc. 4th ed. Vista, CA: Building News, Inc., 2006. vi, 450 p. (PW 2.1000 S83 2006)

Transportation and Streets

Work Zone Public Information and Outreach Strategies, Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, 2005, 1 v. (various pagings): ill. (T 3.4100 W67 2005)

Implementing the Rule on Work Zone Safety and Mobility, Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, 2005, 1 v. (various pagings). (T 3.4100 I 56 2005)

Parking Spaces / Community Places: Finding the Balance through Smart Growth Solutions, Washington, DC U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, Development, Community and Environment Division, 2006, 62 p. : ill. (T 7.1300 P37 2006)

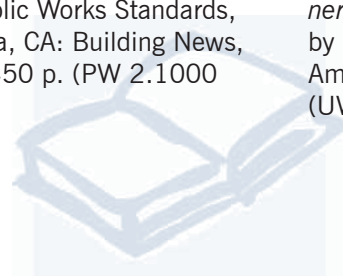
Utilities – Sewers

Using Smart Growth Techniques as Stormwater Best Management Practices, Washington, DC: U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, Development, Community and Environment Division, 2005, 108 p., ill. (US 5.0500 S63 2005)

Utilities – Water

Water Conservation Programs: A Planning Manual, (UW 4.7000 W381 2005)

Good Until the Last Drop: A Practitioner's Guide to Water Reuse, prepared by HDR Engineering, Inc. for the American Public Works Association. (UW 4.7100 G66 2005)▶



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