

BOARD GOVERNANCE

And other ideas

by Supervisor Jack Sweeney

January 20, 2009

First and foremost I believe our Board MUST create an atmosphere that rebuilds our system of governance into a "County Family". That would be a workplace where employees, department heads, the CAO, and we Supervisors all knew what their job was and felt comfortable doing that job. As such each and every member of the family would be willing to step forward and make comments about how to better serve our customers, constituents, and citizens. They would willingly propose solutions to problems, promote a better workplace, and look for ways to reduce costs and increase service. This process starts from the top down and earns its way with respect shown (especially in public) to all of the people we serve and the people we employ to provide the service. This means our Board must start by being a POLICY BOARD and leave MANAGEMENT to the CAO and the other employees.

County Charter Section 211. Communications with Employees

Board of Supervisors' directions, recommendations or instructions to boards, commissions, department heads, or officers shall be by formal Board action. This section does not limit an individual Supervisor's right to obtain information or request advice or assistance in accordance with normal operating policies.

As may be seen from the Charter section, my proposal would not preclude a Supervisor from obtaining staff assistance with a problem or obtaining assistance with formulating and agenda item or similar proposal. I currently find it most helpful to make staff aware of issues by use of e-mails to the specific staff member with copies to their department head and the CAOs office. However, we must be respectful to limit the number of staff in any meetings so as not to be a burden on their time.

My Thought: It is not what we do individually, but what we as the Board of Supervisors do by giving direction on an item we or staff place on the public agenda.

Board Action sets the policy and CAO and department heads set the how!

Second issue is to reformulate our Board meetings so as not to comingle business, policy and ceremonial actions. We need to better respect the time of both the public and the staff. It would be well to have one or two Monday afternoon meetings to have policy discussions. This would give each department an opportunity to explain their programs to the public and the Board. It certainly would improve our understanding of the activities and the needs of the department and the need for those services. We urgently need meetings with the Recreation commission, the Planning Commission, the Transportation Department, and the Mental Health Department; and a lot of others.

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Third issue is to thoroughly examine and understand the county budget. What do we NEED to do and what is NICE to do.

As the leaders of the county we need to reduce our departmental costs even more than we have! We could look at a 5% salary cut; but it would save more money and create a more equal funding for each district if we just did away with any travel or meal expenses for Supervisors or their assistants. This would include expenses for cell phones and other incidental purchases. If a member believes they need to have expenses covered that are not included in their salaries, they would submit a request to the Board before incurring such expenses; this would be for any travel including vehicle rents whether from the County or a vendor.

We also need to have staff develop a budget document that is understandable by us and the public. Envisioned is a page for each program that shows what department is in charge of the program and how it affects other departments; how many and what classifications of personnel are required to provide the program; itemize the costs of the program and the specific source of the revenues for the program. These would be rolled into an overall summary page for the department and those into an overall summary for the county.

We must implement and adopt a five year plan that is moved forward each year that basically sets the goals for where we want to go as far as programs and capital improvements

We need to establish an accounting system that verifies each departments revenues on a monthly basis to avoid a fiscal catastrophe such as occurred at the Mental Health department.

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Fourth issue, and this could and should be a topic of discussion at a joint meeting with the Planning Commission, is a discussion of the implementation of the General Plan in and of itself and its affect on economic development and permit processing.

Fifth issue is the future of the Waste Collection franchises and the future needs for a materials recycling facility (MRF).