

Financial Emergency – When will you act?

The current mayor made declaring a financial emergency her highest priority. Here we are more than a year later, and the primary action has been to raise salaries and benefits and raise taxes. Tonight, addressing the Climate Action Committee will be the first action to rethink how the city can operate more efficiently and save a little money.

For a city of only about 2 square miles and 7,000 people we must have the most complicated government in the county. We have a Planning Commission that handles some development decisions and a Design Review Board that handles others. The recent kerfuffle over a perfectly effective sign on a restaurant shows how little actual oversight these committees have. We are in a period of declining sales tax revenue. The downtown area is increasingly being turned over to the homeless as businesses leave. Repeated discussions at the city council with public input have moved the council a bit toward becoming more business friendly. Yet the city's committees are continuing to discourage business in any way they can think of.

The climate action committee is the topic for discussion tonight. The only actions I have seen in the last two years are proclamations that have little impact and a study to find out why people don't want to put all their gas appliances in the dump and buy new electric. Apparently, the committee members don't live in Sebastopol. Maybe the regular unexpected power outages are discouraging to some. Maybe paying a 10.25 sales tax on new appliances is contributing to the problem? Do you think the persistent high single, low double digit increases in electric cost matter? What about combining more taxes, higher water and sewer rates and increasing electricity costs?

The climate action committee was passed off for years as really no burden on the city. Tonight, we learn it costs taxpayers \$40,000 per year. Some older council members might pass this off as chicken feed. On the other hand, a tremendous amount of effort has gone into an EIFD that would generate about the same dollars per year.

Releasing the Climate Action Committee to fly free is the first humane step. Prioritizing work to look at everything the city does and putting assigning a cost will undoubtedly uncover other "investments" that are too expensive to pursue.