



Thursday, August 20, 2020

Greenville County is not “open for business”.

Greenville County has a fundamental problem. If open, democratic government requires transparent and accountable operations, easy access to information and citizen participation, Greenville County might as well hang up the “CLOSED FOR BUSINESS” sign.

Our elected county leaders do not prioritize transparency. Because of this failure, we get:

- A billion dollar County Square Redevelopment project that is fraught with conflict as outside developers interests are prioritized over the citizens of the county. (11/21/19 Greenville News article link [here.](#))
- A plan for disbursing \$91 million in CARES Act funding, representing almost 50% of the county’s annual budget, that is rubber stamped with no public meeting input. (6/12/20 Greenville News article link [here.](#))
- A Sheriff’s Citizen Advisory Board that is designed, developed and negotiated behind closed doors without any public input before being presented and rubber stamped by the County Council. (7/28/20 Greenville Journal article link [here.](#))
- An historically disenfranchised neighborhood, New Washington Heights, that finds itself with few, if any, options to be heard or participate in the journey to establish a new transit hub for the County. Yet one more example of the government doing something **to** a neighborhood or community vs **with** them. (7/31/2020 Greenville News column by historian Judy Bainbridge [here.](#))

Regular County Council meetings have provided, at best, weak mechanisms for public input, participation and review. Virtual meeting technology is not prioritized and meetings are not recorded for later viewing. During the pandemic, the situation has gotten worse. The open sign up window for the public to speak and participate on general topics (not on the agenda pre-determined by County Council) has been completely removed from all County Council meetings, resulting in a recently filed lawsuit. (8/6/20 Post and Courier article link [here](#), 8/19/20 Post and Courier article link [here.](#))

Transparency requires work. It is not the easy path. Governing a dynamic and fast changing county in an open way is a tall order, but that’s what our county council members were elected to do. Elected leaders have to engage their constituents who have evolving and diverging concerns to balance. Government systems and operations should be constantly under the microscope, scrutinized and reevaluated. Complacency and transparency simply can’t co-exist.

The only way to govern a community that is equitable and just is for our elected leaders to both demand transparency and roll up their sleeves to uphold it. When Greenville County conducts its business in the light of day, in full view of the people it serves, decisions will be better made and tax dollars better cared for.

Then, and only then, will Greenville County fully deserve its “OPEN FOR BUSINESS” shingle.

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