

The Rest of the Story: Political Retribution in Edmonds

For thirteen years, I sat on the Edmonds City Council, working with more than fifteen council members and under five mayors. Over that time, I watched City business unfold in ways that often felt more like high school drama than responsible governance, especially during Mayor Nelson tenure with his reliable simple majority. But this article isn't just about popularity contests or political maneuvering. This is about your money and how political retribution, secrecy, and misplaced priorities are quietly costing Edmonds taxpayers millions.

As someone currently appealing the City's Critical Aquifer Recharge Area (CARA) code, I've seen firsthand how these issues hit twice as hard. The Edmonds Environmental Council has spent over \$31,747 on our appeal (see website), and I estimate the City has spent over \$125,000—between the Mayor, Attorney(s), two Directors and two employees—without even starting to fulfill the Settlement Agreement or hiring a consultant to review PFAS in Deer Creek's critical area recharge zones. Diane's Corner #3 "Bad Administration Advice Taints Environmental Perspective Potentially Impacting Pure Water!" explains how the Attorney changed the trajectory of the code (after I left office) by holding a highly unusual Planning Board Executive Session to change the code to allow UIC wells. If Rosen and the City Council would simply changed the code to prohibit UIC short wells, we could avoid any further costs and more importantly comply with the Clean Water Act. As of this writing Olympic View Water and Sewer District (www.olympicviewwater.com) has issued a "Notice of Intent to Sue the Edmonds School District" to protect our critical area aquifer as it is being threatened by PFAS.

But, let's rewind to 2009. My colleague Lora Petso and I started questioning the City's financial presentations. The numbers were murky, the format confusing, and transparency was nowhere to be found. For daring to ask honest questions, we were branded troublemakers. That pattern continued throughout my tenure and many examples are provided on my website as I was the "numbers person" and former auditor. Under Nelson all his Directors, especially Finance Director Turley were told to just ignore.

When Mayor Haakenson left, I pushed for, and the council approved, a new financial code and format modeled after Redmond, Washington or one that brought real accountability. But with Nelson's arrival, and now with Rosen, it seems financial transparency is slipping away again and new Director Gould is just providing a snapshot or "Council version" despite the City being in a

fiscal emergency. What an embarrassment to anyone trying to limit public access to the financial truth and Rosen and the Council for allowing it.

My efforts didn't stop there. For two years, I've advocated for our local paper, the Beacon, to become the City's official publisher of public notices. Even Mayor Rosen agreed, but nothing changed. Instead, the City continues to pay more to publish in the out-of-town Herald, rather than supporting our own hometown news. Maybe I'm to blame for not seeing this change, since the Beacon is publishing my investigative stories.

Why does this happen? Retribution—subtle, but real. I've slowed my Beacon columns out of concern for retaliation, both against myself and the Beacon.

The financial waste doesn't end there. Utility taxes have become a new "money pot." The City borrowed \$6 million, and most legal fees for all the environmental appeals (Tree Code and loss lawsuit with Rimmer, Perrinville Creek and appeal over blocked creek and CARA code violation) are reportedly being charged to utilities. For the record, I voted no on the 2023 rate study because of questionable allocations. After poring over the raw data, I found at least \$50 million in questionable spending: \$23 million earmarked as an 11 percent share in Lynnwood's yet-to-be-designed sewer plant, a six-month reserve (three is normal) and \$23 million for our own sewer plant that still isn't commissioned or compliant with State nitrogen standards. During the Nelson years, Council was rarely provided a complete packet, and major decisions were made with little debate or oversight. Reckless decisions on code development, environmental issues, and appeals are wasting taxpayer money.

Meanwhile, the City's 2023 audit just happened, and major issues remain unresolved. Where is the Council discussion about the remaining \$7 million in the non-departmental budget targeted for the Fire Contract? The Regional Fire Authority took control of Edmonds' services this month and is now our taxing authority. So why is Rosen pushing for a \$19 million levy, sanctioned by a new group called "Keep Edmonds Vibrant"? This group claims to have found \$9 million more in revenue. Where is the common sense and mathematics? Where is the financial transparency?

I've tried to sound the alarm—sending white papers, sharing findings on environmental appeals, and urging action to save taxpayer money. But, as I saw during Nelson's years, my common-sense warnings are ignored. Some council members seem more interested in protecting their own careers than serving the people. The Mayor has changed the strong Mayor form of government and now wants to hide behind an Administrator? Where was the equitable process and adherence to laws and job descriptions and why even elect a Mayor? Again, what an

embarrassment that City Council is not providing oversight and questioning this significant change in government and start holding public hearings. If approved, Rosen should resign.

I keep pushing for accountability, but all I get is silence or excuses instead of reform.

So yes, I worry about retribution. It's cost me personally, and it's costing all of us as taxpayers. But I haven't stopped watching, and I haven't stopped caring.

As Paul Harvey would say, now you know the rest of the story. Edmonds is a city where transparency was promised, but secrecy prevails. Where political retribution isn't just a rumor, it's a reality. Where millions are spent, and the truth is hard to find. But perhaps, if enough of us pay attention and demand better, the next chapter can be written differently.