

GEAUGA COUNTY 2024 BUDGET HEARING – AUGUST 30, 2023

I need to clear the air regarding the 2024 Geauga County Budget hearing and I also need to publicly apologize to my staff; particularly, Frank, Kate, Pam, Ron, Allen, Kristen, and Tammy who have personally and professionally invested significantly in trying to move the needle on making the budgeting process more transparent and accountable to taxpayers. At the last budget commission meeting, I allowed my hope for progress to overshadow my duty for demanding continuous improvement.

The County Administrator did not sit silent when in March 2022 he threatened to screw with my budget or when he called me incompetent as County Auditor. He didn't sit silent when his staff assured me that our 2023 cyber initiatives would be funded by the Commissioners. He didn't sit silent when he accused my staff of attempting to perform a hostile takeover of water resources and he didn't sit silent when accusing my staff of being the cause of the McFarland shutdown. He didn't sit silent when he promised to fund the Dragos investigation of that incident and likewise he didn't sit silent when he challenged the interpretation of ORC 307.84 and then attempted to initiate a state legislative change to that law to serve his narrative.

The County Administrator did **NOT** sit silent in September 2022, when he signed the verified complaint which resulted in the Commissioners suing me and 2 of my staff members, costing the taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars. He didn't sit silent regarding his desire to encourage the Commissioners to pass a resolution to dissolve ADP. Nor was he silent when he approved the removal of over \$.25m of ADP salaries from already approved 2023 budget a month before a vote of the Board.

He did however sit silent throughout these 2024 budget hearings, particularly this Monday. No commitments, no promises, no assurances, no apologies. We have been presented a request for need for over \$36m of projects lacking detail, timeline, or accurate status yet we are simultaneously to believe that \$2.4m of legitimate departmental and agency requests lack adequate revenue to support inclusion. We, as a Commission, then point to \$4.9m of immediate current year revenue unaccounted for and an additional \$2.46m of additional 2024 revenue, which we are certifying today. These changes increase the anticipated 2024 ending balance by over \$7m. The silence is deafening regarding funding the legitimate requested need for certain county agencies. I therefore must conclude that hope alone does not do it for me. In my opinion, this is an unreasonable budget which does not adequately demonstrate need and I am obligated to vote NO on its approval.

