

Delivered by Corvallis Mayor Charlie Tomlinson to the Corvallis City Council on May 3, 2010.

On April 8, 2010, the Benton County Board of Commissioners received a letter from an Albany attorney, representing the Corvallis-Benton Chamber Coalition as legal counsel, “to request and demand compliance with the County’s obligated payment for the current fiscal year.” You have a copy of that letter and you also have a copy of the response to the letter written by the Chair of the Board.

This method of seeking payment under an agreement between the County and the Chamber Coalition is disturbing. Our community operates on relationship and trust between citizens and between organizations. When an organization resorts to the legal system to settle a dispute over a contract, relationship and trust are broken.

This is not the first time that the Chamber Coalition has had relationship problems. The relationship between Hewlett Packard and the Chamber Coalition suffered damage. Hewlett Packard is your largest property taxpayer and the Chamber Coalition is your primary economic development partner. You can search the Corvallis Gazette-Times archives to learn more about this episode. The Chamber Coalition strained its relationship with some elected officials in the debate over the Business License Fee.

Our community has significant economic development challenges facing us in the future. These challenges are outlined in the White Paper presented to the Council in your last meeting. Adding lack of trust and poor relationship between organizations makes our efforts much more difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

Someone told me that if you find yourself in a hole, first put down the shovel. To that end, I believe a change in leadership at the Chamber Coalition is needed before our community can proceed toward a viable economic future. I also believe the Chamber Coalition cannot perform both a member-based government advocacy role and an economic development role funded through local government funds.

I ask the City Council to take an active leadership role in shaping our economy; a role based upon strong relationships and enduring trust. Regarding your partners, you are the customer; demand exceptional customer service and measureable outcomes that matter. Our citizens demand the same high level of customer service from you. Council leadership can work with the County Commissioners to shape a jointly-developed economic vitality program. You can ask your Chamber Coalition liaison to request that the Chamber Coalition Board end hostilities and that redress through legal means does not build relationships or trust.

For my part, I outlined my thoughts regarding economic vitality in past State of the City addresses. Whether you agree or disagree with my perspective, you owe it your constituents to move our community forward. Whatever your plan, ground it in strong relationships and trust with your partners. Where we are today cannot be where we are tomorrow.

In closing, I ask that you act decisively and strategically, and in a timely manner, in matters relating to economic development, and that you call for an end to this kind of misguided behavior.