

# **“Once the public dollars are spent, gathering data for monitoring benefit can be like pulling teeth from a crocodile”**

The Bethlehem Gadfly Serious Issues, Wind Creek Casino December 7, 2019

 Latest post in a series about Wind Creek Casino 

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Gadfly,

Having administered many economic development grants in my time with the City, I absolutely agree that performance measurements would be extremely important to determine whether there is actually a benefit to the expenditure of public dollars on economic development projects. Philosophically, I have always taken issue how over time public dollars have evolved from paying for public infrastructure in support of development to actually funding the development itself, which I believe banks should be doing.

Grant applications for state and federal funds generally require that public benefit be measured. How many jobs and what kinds of jobs (salaries?) will be created, how many construction jobs were created, what is the projected increase in taxes, is there any spin-off benefit to

other local businesses, etc. are the kinds of projections that can make or break an application for funding assistance.

However, once the public dollars are spent, gathering data for monitoring benefit can be like pulling teeth from a crocodile. Cooperation by businesses isn't stellar. I also used to wonder whether anybody, particularly elected officials, even cared if that data was gathered. After all, the positive press and political benefit of having delivered a grant is all about re-election and public image of "bringing home the bacon" for politicians. As the City's grants administrator, my leverage to get data dropped drastically once the money was spent to help a business be constructed. Perhaps that has improved over time, but my cynical side tells me that this kind of business development assistance was more about politics than anything else. It's kind of like your grocer collecting for a charitable cause at check-out and then touting that they contributed \$1 million to some cause. They didn't, you and I and many others did!. Public dollars belong to us and politicians like to act like Santa Claus with everyone else's money!

So, Peter's thought is sound, but I'm not so sure whether the cooperation and/or political will exist to pursue data driven results when public dollars go into business development. At least in days past when public infrastructure was built to support that development, the public had a tangible asset in place such as roads, traffic signals, public utilities, landscaping, and information technology infrastructure.

Dana