

# 20 things a good Mayor could accomplish without breaking a sweat during his first month in office

**BECAUSE THERE'S MUCH MORE TO RUNNING A CITY THAN SPOUTING TIRED BROMIDES, PITHY PROMISES, AND CHEERY "VISIONS" FOR THE FUTURE**

by Jim Mathewson

I used to work for a fine fellow who produced and marketed motivational programs, sales training programs, and programs to help people develop more of their innate creative thinking abilities.

He used to speak often about how quickly a business or organization could improve if EACH employee came up with just ONE creative idea EACH DAY to improve the employee's service to the organization or the organization's service to its customers, clients, or constituents.

One idea per day. That's 20 or more ideas per month per employee ... even if they don't use their brains on the weekends !!

I'm always reluctant to tell someone else how to do his or her job so I'm resisting the temptation to tell our new Mayor how to do his job. Instead, I'll simply share some thoughts and ideas here about what I might do during MY first twenty days in the Mayor's office.

(FULL DISCLOSURE: While I'm reluctant to tell someone how to do their job, it's entirely possible that from time to time in the past I may have suggested to the publisher and editors of the Tribune-Eagle what they might do with their newspaper. Just chalk it up to my insatiable desire to always be a useful citizen.)

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## 1 DOING THE PUBLIC'S BUSINESS

The past two or three years under Mayor Jack Spiker have been marked by unprecedented dissension and friction on the City Council which has often spilled over into other operational areas within the City.

While many focus the blame on one or two Council members who may have taken their jobs a little too seriously, Jack Spiker's inability or unwillingness to chair the Council meetings in a fair and even-handed manner was a major contributing factor to the problem. His goal in many cases seemed to be to curry favor with those on the Council and in the media who wanted to frustrate or destroy selected members of the governing body who didn't share Mayor Spiker's spend-it-all-and-then-some approach to City government.

Perhaps there should be a large banner created and hung in the back of the Council chamber which the Mayor and all nine members of the Council would have to look at during the entirety of each meeting.

If I were designing such a banner it would read: WE'RE CONDUCTING THE PUBLIC'S BUSINESS IN THIS ROOM. IF YOU CAN'T DO IT IN A LEGAL, ETHICAL, AND FISCALLY-RESPONSIBLE MANNER, GET OUT NOW.

## 2 DISHONESTY BY CITY EMPLOYEES

The Maggie Carter incident back in 2004 was a good example of how not to handle a situation where a City employee is caught red-handed stealing from the citizens of Cheyenne. Even though the evidence of wrong-doing was easy to see and understand, she was allowed to receive over \$6,000 worth of pay and benefits while on "paid administrative leave".

I would make it clear to all City employees that theft and lying are totally unacceptable at all levels. Those caught red-handed would be put on UNpaid administrative leave pending an investigation.

If the charges are ultimately dismissed, the employee's escrowed pay would be paid with interest. If the charges are substantiated resulting in termination, the escrowed pay would return to the City's treasury.

## 3 CITY COUNCIL'S CONSENT AGENDA

The recent changes in the City Council's "Consent Agenda" are an embarrassment to the Mayor's office, the City Council, and every citizen of Cheyenne. The mean-spirited changes were instituted merely for spite and have no other reason for being continued.

If the City Council is not willing to make the necessary changes to go back to the wording and intent of its original Consent Agenda provision, then the Mayor has it within his power to simply refuse to place any but the most routine and non-controversial items on the Consent Agenda where they are voted upon as a solitary non-debatable item.

## 4 USE AND ABUSE OF CITY VEHICLES

There is simply no reason why the citizens of Cheyenne should be paying for vehicles ... sometimes very pricey vehicles ... to carry certain City employees to work and back home again at the end of the day or at lunchtime.

Why, for example, does the Director of the Civic Center need the exclusive round-the-clock use of a thirty thousand dollar SUV paid for by the City to facilitate his transit to work and back home again. Ridiculous. Let him pay for his own car and insurance ... or perhaps he could take advantage of the City's highly-subsidized Transit Program. Now there's a great idea !!!

What's needed is an immediate inventory of ALL City vehicles which are assigned to individual City employees. Those vehicles which aren't being used by employees on emergency or on-call status should be returned to the motor pool unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise.

After THE HERALD printed a story about this problem earlier this year, Jack Spiker made some cosmetic changes which are to be applied to NEW employees only. He said the CURRENT employees with City vehicles are being "grandfathered" with respect to vehicle rules.

Perhaps a new Mayor should announce that Gramps left the building the instant Jack Spiker's term ended.

## 5 PUBLICATION OF VOUCHER INFO

The City of Cheyenne is quite proud of its new website being operated by a company in Kansas.

One of the nice features is the ability to look at the same voucher report the members of the City Council see and vote upon.

The problem is that only the vouchers approved at an evening Council meeting can be viewed this way. The vouchers approved during the other two meetings each month have not been available for viewing on the website.

When the City Clerk was asked about this, she responded that she only does the minimum that the State Statutes require ... a very surprising and disappointing

answer from the one City official whose office has always been noted for outstanding constituent service. Just one more example, perhaps, of how Jack Spiker's unfriendly attitude toward certain citizens has infected other floors of City Hall.

## 6 UNELECTED BOARDS

The Mayor of Cheyenne appoints many people to boards and commissions. While many of these entities are relatively benign, some wield considerable power and spending authority.

A mayor making such appointments should select people who REALLY understand and appreciate that they are conducting the public's business and are not being put there in an unelected capacity to simply rubberstamp and approve every proposal and proposition which comes their way.

Another worthy change a mayor might make would be to require each of those boards to make a periodic presentation about their activities to a regular meeting of the City Council and to be prepared to answer specific questions about their spending of public money.

## 7 CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTS

It's now almost become a running joke among contractors and consultants doing business with the City of Cheyenne. Bid low enough to get the job and then find plenty of excuses to submit contract modifications once the work begins. As we've documented here in THE HERALD, it's not unusual for the contract modifications to double or triple the original estimated cost of a project or program.

Another good change would be to end the practice of letting project "designers" simply take over the "construction management" phase of the same project they designed. While this may make the contracting process simpler, it too often seems to result in shoddy or totally unacceptable work for some reason.

As Capitol Avenue and some recent additions to the Greenway can attest, correcting shoddy work can be much more expensive than simply doing it right the first time. Having separate "designers" and "construction managers" may be a good first step.

## 8 SECRET "SERVICE" CONTRACTS

As we at THE HERALD have also documented recently, there have been numerous examples at Jack

Spiker's City Hall of certain City employees simply entering into pricey contracts with outsiders or buddies without any formal bidding process and often without the knowledge of the City Council until it came time to pay the eye-popping bills.

Even the City Attorney (who's supposed to approve all contracts) and the City Clerk (who's supposedly the official custodian of all City contract documents) were in the dark about some of these secret "professional service contracts" until we started asking for photocopies.

A mayor should make it crystal clear to all department heads that such private or secret contracts are totally unacceptable in the future. The fact that Jack Spiker didn't want to know about them should not be used as a yardstick for what constitutes good government.

**9 PARKING DIVISION AUDIT**

When the downtown parking structure was built with about 730 parking spaces, we were told by Bob Bradshaw, the Special Projects Director, that as many as 1200 renters could be accommodated because it was highly unlikely that more than 60% of the permit holders would be using the garage at any one time.

Recently when the City wanted to con the State Loan and Investment Board into forking over hundreds of thousands of dollars to purchase a lot for surface parking near the Mayor's furniture store, Bradshaw and the Mayor said that the 600 current permit holders meant that the parking structure was virtually "at capacity".

Perhaps it's time for a comprehensive audit of Mr. Bradshaw's Parking Division to determine once and for all how much money is actually coming in, what it's being used for, and how many ACTUAL holders of parking permits are still paying for the privilege.

**10 BUDGET INTEGRITY**

Each spring the Mayor and the City Council engage in an extended song and dance routine to arrive at a budget for the coming fiscal year which starts on July 1st. Almost immediately after the start of the fiscal year, however, money starts being moved from one City fund to another, often without notification or a readily-available paper trail for citizens to follow.

Such practices suggest that the whole budget-making exercise in the spring is little more than an elaborate sham designed to show the citizenry what fiscally-responsible leaders we've entrusted the City treasury to.

Perhaps such free-wheeling transfers of budgeted funds might abate if the City Treasurer were required to make a full disclosure at each City Council meeting.

A new mayor might also want to take a look at any recently-created staff positions which weren't accounted for in the most recent budget but have suddenly materialized in the waning days of the Spiker administration to provide well-paid jobs and benefits for certain friends.

**11 INTERNAL AUDITOR**

The thefts and falsified vouchers by City Council employee Maggie Carter in 2004 were supposed to trigger some changes in the way the City's accounts payable are verified before or after payment is made. It appears, however, that little has actually changed to make the citizens feel a lot more confident about how the City's fifty million dollars are spent each year.

The creation of an Independent Auditor position would go a long way to assuring that everything is being verified BEFORE the money goes out the door.

Perhaps it would also be an appropriate time to ask why the citizens of Cheyenne have been paying hundreds of dollars the past few years to renew the City Treasurer's membership in the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

Being a CPA is NOT a job requirement for the City Treasurer's position. If she wants to keep her CPA ticket on ice while she's working for the City of Cheyenne, that's perfectly acceptable. At \$70,000+ per year, she can surely afford to do that out of her own pocket for a change.

**12 PROFESSIONAL FEES**

Last May, the voters of both Laramie County and the City of Cheyenne handily rejected the gold-plated Recreation Center which Jack Spiker and his allies on the City Council were salivating over. Evidently a lot of voters turned against it after THE HERALD reported about the 22 shower curtains worth \$400 each, the many \$600 urinal dividers, and a number of other items which seem to have been added for the purpose of driving up costs.

It's time for the City of Cheyenne to go to a fixed fee system for large projects. The practice of paying designers and consultants a percentage of the project's costs only serves as a disincentive to design and manage such City projects in a fiscally-responsible manner.

**13 SUGGESTION SYSTEM**

The City of Cheyenne is fortunate to have a lot of excellent employees who can be a rich source of ideas for improving how the citizens of the City are served and how the City's assets and resources are maximized.

The best way to foster such ideation among employees is the creation of a REAL suggestion system which offers tangible monetary rewards for good ideas which save money. In a GOOD suggestion system typical of quality organizations in the private sector, an employee can receive 15-25% of the first year's savings which result from a submitted idea.

There's no doubt about it ... a GOOD, HONEST suggestion system would pay for itself many times over and could inject new enthusiasm and interest into the job for many City employees.

**14 TUITION REIMBURSEMENT**

Rewarding City employees for taking the time and trouble to improve themselves in college-level classes is money well spent.

The problem comes when crafty individuals trick the City into reimbursing them for money sent to bogus, unaccredited diploma mills like the one from Mississippi from which Police Chief Bob Fecht received his worthless Master's Degree in Criminal Justice ... plus, of course, his \$2500 reimbursement from the City Treasurer.

With a single stroke of a pen, a Mayor could put an end to any current or future reimbursements for phony degrees or classes. Just for fun, let's make it retroactive.

**15 ASSET TRACKING**

You could have knocked me over with a horny goatweed when I learned that the City Treasurer wasn't making any effort to track or inventory the hundreds of pieces of equipment purchased with City funds each year.

The Treasurer implied it was too much trouble to purchase and apply scannable barcodes like the State of Wyoming and most other responsible public entities do.

It's not too expensive or troublesome to implement an inventory tracking system which has integrity. To not do so when you're spending several million dollars per year for new hardware, tools, or pieces of equipment is irresponsible, short-sighted, and just plain lazy.

**16 BELVOIR WATER ANALYSIS**

When the City of Cheyenne spent \$5,900,000 for the Belvoir Ranch, we were assured that it offered an abundant source of good water which could be tapped for generations to come.

So far, not a single drop of Belvoir water has found its way into the City's water system. Indeed, the only thing we've learned about the water on the Belvoir is that it contains a measurable amount of TCE, a known cancer-causing agent which found its way into the groundwater under the Belvoir when the ranch included an ICBM missile site.

Perhaps it's time for a new Mayor to request a comprehensive analysis of the groundwater under the Belvoir Ranch. Such an analysis should be complete and the

results should be disclosed to the public. If the water contains something more than just TCE ... something like heavy metals, for example ... the citizens of Cheyenne deserve to know that before another dollar is spent on more drilling or more pipe dreams from consultants.

**17 ACCOUNTABILITY AUDITS**

The City of Cheyenne owns the former UP Depot but allows the Old West Museum to act as the building's manager and collector of rents. Perfectly fine provided all of the tenants are paying their fair share for rent and utilities. When the Museum was asked for an accounting, it claimed to be a private, nonprofit entity to which the Public Records Act does not apply.

Let's find out what's going on down there ... and while we're at it, perhaps we should find out once and for all how all the hundreds of thousands of City dollars which are handed over to the Downtown Development Authority are really being spent.

**18 VISA CARDS AND CELLPHONES**

At one time, more than 170 City employees had been issued VISA cards by the City Treasurer ... a recipe for more Maggie Carter-like incidents in the future. This needs to be reduced to a manageable number with more controls in place to prevent or at least detect misuse.

Restrictions are also long overdue to limit the use of City-issued cellphones for non-City business. Jack Spiker thought it was perfectly okay when Parks Director Rick Parish made or received over 800 calls to/from family and friends during a several month period to promote his part-time hunting activities. Such abuse of City-issued phones and worktime should be stopped immediately.

**19 CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Clarification is also long overdue on conflict of interest standards for the City's elected officials. Merely leaving the room when certain vouchers are being voted upon is not enough. For Mayor Jack Spiker to participate in negotiations to spend \$700,000 of public funds to buy a lot near his family's furniture store for a public parking lot was clearly a bald-faced conflict of interest but he got what he wanted and we're now paying for it.

**20 UNHEALTHY BEDFELLOWS**

The local daily newspaper gave Jack Spiker and his administration almost total immunity from criticism. In exchange, the paper got exclusive inside information not available to the public or others in the media.

Now we're going to have a new Mayor who was on the Board of Directors of that same newspaper for 12 years. Such "special" relationships between elected officials and a city's only daily newspaper present unhealthy potential problems which should be avoided from Day 1.

**SCORECARD**  
as of  
December 30, 2008

**MATHEWSON**  
**20**

**KAYSEN**  
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*\*The new Mayor gets one bonus credit for already forcing Bob Fecht to make a choice between being a full-time Police Chief for the City or a part-time State Senator*