

# Don't deliver half a loaf

Budgeting basics are still beyond the grasp of our local government agencies.

Parks & Rec estimated it could build 21 units of affordable housing for its employees for \$5.6 million. They had some money, but needed \$2.9M in SPET funding to make the project go.

Now it turns out the \$5.6M they budgeted won't cover even half the true cost. Shaw Construction was the only company to submit a bid, and it was for \$11.4M, not \$5.6M. The bid was rightly rejected by town and county leaders last week.

This chasm between the budgetary estimate and the construction bid represents a lot more than escalating costs and paying higher 'premiums' on everything in Teton County. It's not just a miscalculation or spreadsheet error (see Housing Authority fiasco and the Grove). This is not a cost overrun.

It is egregious misrepresentation to the taxpaying public when the "ask" looks nothing like the end product. If town and county leaders promoted the project as housing at the rate of about \$267k per unit, that's what it should look like when it's on the ground. A bid to build the project at \$543k per unit is absurd—even in this county.

Already, Parks & Rec is talking about scaling back the project. When facing costs that are double what you have in hand, you don't scale

back and deliver half of what was promised. You start over.

The Parks & Rec director appears to be leaning toward a redesign that retains the equipment storage part of the plan by reducing the housing component. "Our highest priority from the very beginning when we started this was to get our equipment inside," the department director said at last week's meeting.

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*Taxpayers never agreed to buy Parks & Rec a garage.*

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That's not how it was sold to the public. Taxpayers never agreed to buy Parks & Rec a garage. The approved SPET item was for housing only. There was no mention of storage.

Only commissioner Paul Vogelheim, it seems, is uncomfortable with changing the approved SPET item after the fact. "We made a commitment and a deal with voters" he said at the meeting.

If this goes ahead as a garage and scaled back housing, voters won't be getting what they voted for. It will be a classic bait-and-switch, another example of government incompetence. Voters deserve better.

The project should be abandoned until the next SPET ballot when Parks & Rec can try again.

Government needs to learn what the rest of us know already: when your plans are off by a factor of two, you start over.

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