

## TESTIMONY OF AMY LYONS

TO: Interim Legislative Committee on Idaho Urban Renewal Law

FROM: Amy Lyons, Coeur d'Alene

DATE: October 19, 2015

SUBJECT: "Transparent As Black Tape"

1. My name is Amy Lyons and I am a Midtown Coeur d'Alene homeowner. The local redevelopment agency wants to squeeze a 38-unit LIHTC project onto a busy corner in Midtown. It's been nearly impossible to get truthful, accurate information about the URA's plans for Midtown from the (taxpayer funded) agency itself. I do not know the current status of the project.

2. In August, the URA's proposed FY2016 budget was published by the Coeur d'Alene *Press* in advance of the public hearing. I hoped and expected an itemized budget would provide a clue as to the future of Midtown. No such luck. The public was told only that *millions* of tax dollars would be spent on "administration" and "expenses."

3. Ultimately the redevelopment agency did surrender its FY2016 budget, but not before the *Press* wrote an editorial criticizing the URA ("ignite cda is transparent as black tape," August 19, 2015). Apparently the URA refused to provide the budget to the *Press* unless the newspaper made a public records request.

4. Attached are: my e-mail correspondence with the URA's Executive Director, my August 16, 2015 letter to the *Press* ("Citizen seeks budget details") and the *Press*' August 19, 2015 editorial.

5. This episode exemplifies the adversarial attitude and secretive culture of Coeur d'Alene's unelected, unaccountable redevelopment agency. Thank you for allowing me to share this experience, which I hope is useful to the Committee.

## **IGNITE: Citizen seeks budget details**

**Posted: Sunday, August 16, 2015 12:00 am**

There's a public hearing on ignite cda's proposed 2016 budget this coming Wednesday, Aug. 19. The hearing is required for adoption of its \$7,000,000+ budget, but ignite cda refuses to disclose where the (taxpayers') money is going. The "budget" lists only three expense items: "administration," "expenses/debt service" and "capital/debt service." Nothing more specific than that. (Unknown "expenses/debt service" are more than \$4,369,000.) This taxpayer wanted more information from ignite cda and emailed its Executive Director, Tony Berns. Here's my question and Mr. Berns' answer.

Mr. Berns:

1. According to the Notice of Public Hearing, "additional information" regarding the Urban Renewal Agency's FY2016 budget, goals and strategies is available from the Agency website. I cannot find any information about the proposed budget on the new website. When will it be posted?

His reply:

The statement "Additional information regarding the Agency's FY2016 budget, goals and strategies is available from the Agency's Executive Director, or from the Agency website ([www.ignitecda.org](http://www.ignitecda.org))" included in the legal notice is intended to be general in nature and intended to direct folks who want to learn more about the Agency (e.g. Agency goals/strategies via review of posted minutes, review of past Agency financial audits, review of recent Agency financial statements) to the website.

Really? The legal notice states that ignite cda welcomes comments about the "budget" and invites the public to submit questions. Not true. Ignite cda: new name, same old run around.

AMY LYONS

Coeur d'Alene

## **OPINION: ignite cda is transparent as black tape**

Posted: Wednesday, August 19, 2015 12:00 am

Editor's note: Ignite cda's public hearing on its 2016 fiscal year budget is today at 4 p.m. in the Coeur d'Alene Library Community Room. The public is invited to attend.

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Tens of thousands of tax dollars don't buy much goodwill when the public is treated like a pain in the tax increment.

In a letter to the editor Sunday, Coeur d'Alene resident Amy Lyons expressed her frustration with ignite cda - Coeur d'Alene's urban renewal agency, formerly known as Lake City Development Corp. - when her request for specific information about the agency's proposed budget was given the runaround. Amy learned something The Press and others, including City Councilman Dan Gookin, have known for a long time. LCDC/ignite cda is the region's most reluctant public body when it comes to real transparency.

Last Friday, Press City Editor Maureen Dolan emailed Tony Berns, ignite cda's executive director, and respectfully asked that the newspaper be provided a copy of the proposed budget for the coming fiscal year. Berns did not comply with the request but instead emailed a pdf of the agency's public records request form and asked her to fill that out and return it.

Unlike most forms that go back and forth, the pdf had to be printed out and Dolan was then tasked with filling it out by hand. That's not just inconvenient; it also precludes the records seeker from going into as much detail as is sometimes necessary to acquire the needed information. That detail is important because it generally saves the person fulfilling the records request time and energy, which ultimately is money. The more specific the request, the easier it is to narrow the search and serve the person asking for information.

Yesterday, when The Press still had not received the information it had initially requested Friday, Dolan contacted Berns to find out why. He replied that the information had been mailed - and by that he meant the U.S. Postal Service. Not email, which would've arrived in seconds and allowed the newspaper time to give readers a preview of today's ignite cda budget hearing. While it would've shown exemplary public service, Berns also could have brought the records to The Press. His office and The Press are literally across the street from one another.

We wish this was simply a communication problem or personal dispute between a private business and a public entity or even a newspaper editor and ignite cda 's highly paid leader. But it is not. Just ask Amy Lyons or Dan Gookin. They'll tell you that by any name, Coeur d'Alene's urban renewal agency doesn't understand who's working for whom.

amy lyons  
to me atyahoo

Sat, Aug 15 11:08 AM

Fw: RE: Proposed FY 2016 Budget/ July board meeting video & minutes

Sent from Yahoo Mail on Android

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**From:** Tony Berns- Ignite <tonyb@ignitecda.org>;  
**To:** <winstonlyons@yahoo.com>;  
**Subject:** RE: Proposed FY 2016 Budget/ July board meeting video & minutes  
**Sent:** Thu, Aug 13, 2015 8:35:42 PM

Mrs. Lyons – responses to your questions are below.

**From:** winstonlyons@yahoo.com [mailto:winstonlyons@yahoo.com]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, August 12, 2015 12:37 PM  
**To:** Tony Berns <TonyB@lcdc.org>  
**Cc:** gregg@lgddesign.net  
**Subject:** Proposed FY 2016 Budget/ July board meeting video & minutes

Mr. Berns:

1. According to the Notice of Public Hearing, “additional information” regarding the Urban Renewal Agency’s FY2016 budget, goals and strategies is available from the Agency website. I cannot find any information about the proposed budget on the new website. When will it be posted?

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2. When will the July 15, 2015 board meeting video be available?