

A Taxing Opinion

There have been times in the past when the role of the public seems greatly diminished. Members of council must assure that the public is informed of the facts that impact them, given a voice, and always treated with respect.

Few people understand our complex budget. Taxpayers are counting on the council and the staff to safeguard their tax dollars and to assure every dollar is needed and used wisely.

During 2020 budget hearings for the current budget, a local taxpayer wrote to the council suggesting potential budget reductions for lobbying and legal fees, comparing the Village expenditures to those budgeted by Marathon. That can be a time consuming task.

During budget hearings, Marathon's budget for legal services was \$380,627. Islamorada's was \$489,100 – 28% higher than Marathon.

Marathon budgeted \$164,000 for lobbying. Islamorada budgeted \$223,000 including the \$30,000 for a legislative aide, 36% more than Marathon.

For just these two services, Islamorada budgeted \$167,473 more than the city to our south though we are smaller in population by 35%. Seems like an astute member of the public who worked diligently to review a complex budget document.

While the taxpayer sent the email to the Village Council, via the Village Clerk, the Village Council received a response from the Village Attorney:

Council:

At the risk of letting facts interfere with someone's narrative, the info and representations below from JZB are **inaccurate**.

1. The Village's lobbying costs for FY 20-21 (the coming fiscal year) total **\$188,000**. (That's only a \$20K thousand difference from Marathon's \$168,000 and includes our 3 lobbyists vs. Marathon's 2).
2. the Village's legal expenditures are **NOT** double that of Marathon. In actuality, they are very similar. For comparison:
 - a. For FY 18-29, the difference between Marathon's legal expenditures and the Village's was approximately **\$8,500** (\$493,473 – \$501,922).
 - b. For FY 19-20, the estimated difference between legal expenditures for Marathon and the Village is less than **\$4,000** (\$546,274 - \$542,350).

Although the budgets are reflected differently, the expenditures for the past two years are indeed very comparable. If you'd like to further clarification, please contact me directly with any questions.

PLEASE DO NOT 'REPLY ALL' OR OTHERWISE CROSS COMMUNICATE REGARDING THIS MATTER OUTSIDE OF A PUBLICLY NOTICED MEETING.



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1. The Village Attorney, in questioning the accuracy of the original email from the taxpayer, eliminated the \$30,000 paid to the legislative aide who does most of the same tasks done by the lobbyists.

It is the Village Attorney himself who gets that extra \$30,000 as our legislative aide.

2. The Legal expenditures quoted by the taxpayer were taken directly out of the budgets approved by Islamorada and Marathon and are the figures that help determine the millage rate and what taxes property owners will pay. The Village Attorney provided numbers that have no impact during budget approval diverting attention from the argument the taxpayer made.

Perhaps one of the most important improvements that our local government can make is to remember the chain of command starting with the fact the Council works for the people. And make absolutely certain that the people of Islamorada have a real voice and are shown respect by council and staff.