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BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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If you'll allow me a few comments as the Chair here. So, this has been a challenging process. In fact, in my years on the commission I would say this has been the most challenging work this commission has done over these past 8 years and, interestingly enough, it's not one we asked for. It's one that the federal government dished to us and said, "Okay, here it is." When we started that, we made the decision to, instead of internalizing the application of this money, to push this to the community and asked the community to participate as the applicators for this money, at least most of it. I think when we started that process we understood that that would push us as a board to our political limits, it would push us to our capacity to engage, and to compromise, and to reach conclusions, because this was never going to be easy and it hasn't been easy.

Fact is, we ended up with \$3 billion of ask from our community and when that happened it guaranteed most of you out there would be disappointed, most of you, because we only had \$127 million to spread over \$3 billion of asks. We had 300 projects and we could only fund a few.

So, with our eyes open, we went in and proceeded with a project that we knew was going to leave many of you disappointed, but committed that at the end of the day we would do the best we can to find those projects that would be acceptable across this very diverse board, and a diverse community, and a diverse county that would in fact make a difference. It's been said before and I'll say it again, there's not a single member of this board who would have written this allocation. No one. I have sat in the center of these debates, along with Commissioner Wooden, and I'll guarantee you none of you had a project spread that looked like this. Those of you that represent the urban core had a spread that looked one way. Those of you that live and represent the suburban donut had a spread that looked quite different. Those of you that live and represent the rural areas had something that looked quite different. We know in our county we have approximately 200,000 residents in the City of Grand Rapids, we have about 200,000 in the donut area, and we have about 250,000 in the rural township area. All of those individuals have quite different experiences in life and each of you represent different areas that have different experiences.

And so, when it came to the task of asking you to identify those projects that you think are transformational, I expected each of you to look at it from the perspective of where you sit. And you know what? When you came back it you came back with different ideas. Those of you that represent the City of Grand Rapids had a specific idea of what transformation looks like. Those of you that represent townships had quite a different perspective. Not surprising at all, is it? So, this process, in order to be equitable, to be fair, to represent the entire diverse county was a very daunting task for you. It required every one of you to go into this process prepared to not just define what you thought was transformational but be open to listening to what would be transformational in other segments of this county, your colleagues', and to recognize that they see it quite differently.

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But at the end of the day, for us to take this lottery win, if you will, and push it out there so that it can make a difference across all those segments mandated you to compromise, to accept that somebody else's perspective is and might be different.

So, that's what we did. It wasn't easy. Probably most of you noticed we were still talking after we called the order here today in order to do that. And we knew that when we did this, when we identified these projects there were going to be projects that each commissioner's going to say, "I don't like that." And there's also going to be lots of projects, a lot of projects, great quality projects, that aren't going to make the list. Not because they're bad projects, but just because they didn't make the list. Because this process required us to basically compromise, keep our eyes on the goal, so at the end of this process we do come to a conclusion that does allows us to push this money out into the community and make a difference. Is it a perfect resolution? It is not. If we had a vote today, is this the perfect resolution? The vote is 19-0. No, 18-0, sorry. Thank you. That's what it is. If it is to vote for only those projects that are high quality and great transformational projects then we'd probably have 250, not 30. But that's not before us. We can't do that.

We have to find a way of using this complicated, convoluted, I use the word "chunky", political process of coming together from disparate areas, disparate political perspectives, and at the end of the day say, "Can we formulate something that makes a difference?" I submit that we've done that. Not perfectly. We've not done it perfectly. And I love Commissioner Ponstein's comments; this is not the end of what it takes to transform a community, by no means. It barely is the beginning. And those of you who are out there that aren't going to get funded in this ultimate project process should never walk away saying, "Oh, that's terrible. We're done. Close up shop." This is the beginning. Every one of you ought to be able to move with those visions and those inspirations and go forward, and we stand ready to participate with that.

Are you disappointed if you were a project that didn't get selected? Absolutely. Would you love to have been on that list? Absolutely. Could we have done better? Probably. I think though that this represents a fair compromise between these diverse perspectives, both political perspectives, social perspectives, economic perspectives, and identified an allocation that those of you in the townships can say, "Okay, there's a change available here in my area." Those in the suburb area can say, "There's possibility for changes that we can accomplish here in this area."



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And those of you in the urban core can identify, "Look it, there are projects here specifically focused to make a big difference in the urban area." That's the compromise this represents, not perfect, but I acknowledge all of you for staying on task, doing something that probably many said, "It's a fool's errand, you shouldn't have started this to begin with." But here we are and we're going to push about \$100 million out into the community and start making a difference. So, thank you for that. I hope you support this resolution and let us roll up our sleeves and move forward.

-Stan Stek
Chair, Kent County Board of Commissioners