

## Why spend money on 'wants' rather than 'needs?'

By Steve Ames

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— Two weeks ago, the city of Clinton announced plans to take on a city street project of unprecedented size and scope. This is great news for Clinton and the surrounding areas. The announcement also made me think about some of the questions posed right here on the editorial page.

Many people have asked “why are we extending 19th Avenue North when so many other streets are in need of repair?” and “why are we going out to ask for grants for riverfront projects when we need so many other things?” No matter how they are phrased, they are really asking the same thing — Why are we funding wants, instead of funding needs? To answer this, I will use an analogy posed to me recently by an acquaintance, which equated government spending to supporting a family. The question posed was this — Say your family needs food, shelter, and clothing, but also wants a new car. A generous person says they will give you \$10,000, but only to buy a new car. Do you accept the money and use it to purchase the new car you want, as instructed, or do you buy the other things your family really needs? This seems like a simple answer to most — buy what you really need. But, the answer is really more complex than it seems on the surface. Going back to receiving grants for projects, communities ask for help with a large variety of wants and needs every year, from a finite pool of money. The danger in spending money allocated for a specific “want” on a “need” you would rather fund is:

- You will have to return money you now no longer have.
  - You will very likely be denied future funding because you didn't spend the previous grant as it was intended.
- Keep in mind that thousands of requests are received by our legislators every year. They have the monumental task of evaluating where the funding they secure will make the greatest impact. When it comes to requesting government funding, communities ask for everything, and thankfully accept what we receive. On the surface, enhancing the riverfront may not seem as important as making sure we have good roads, but when we receive grants for quality of life projects, it frees up money to be spent elsewhere — like the street project which will soon commence. In the grand scheme of community and economic development, everything is a “need” and every little bit helps.

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