



## Thoughts . . . Let's Travel

**CBA** – Cost Benefit Analysis, what is the benefit and what is the cost? A well-managed company makes certain that the benefit always outweighs the cost. How does the City of Manhattan handle travel and the value of that travel? So far the newly elected City Commission has been busy taking a few trips - at tax payer expense. The question is did the City gain anything from the trips?

We might start by looking at the Annual pilgrimage to Washington D.C. that is billed as the AUSA conference. The cost of that little visit was \$4,902.16. Mayor Matta, Commissioner Jankovich and City Manager Ron Fehr attended that conference.

The next trek was off to Seattle in the State of Washington. This was a National League of Cities conference. Commissioner Reddi and Deputy City Manager Hilgers attended that conference. The cost \$3,563.48.

In January during the Martin Luther Jr. weekend Holiday is the 2014 Leaders Regional Retreat. Billed as a Joint Chamber event for Junction City, Manhattan and Wamego it is all about promoting regionalism for the Flint Hills. The two day event is hosted in Overland Park Kansas. This year the city will send four City Commissioners, Matta, McCulloh, Reddi and Jankovich plus seven city Staff members. Total cost will be \$2900.



The three trips highlighted total \$11,365. What is the Cost Benefit Analysis? The Commissioners and the Staff will tell you that it is important to go to the conference to gain information and lobby for funds. OK, but can that be quantified? What fantastic bits of information were gained at the conferences that will turn into items of benefit for the City as a whole? The group that attended the AUSA conference claims that they made networking connections with the staff members of the Kansas representatives to the House and Senate. Those connections supposedly translate into getting NBAF funds, ensuring the Manhattan gets its share of federal grants and helping save Fort Riley from closure by the BRAC. The NLC conference in Seattle was billed as having some valuable meetings that present some good ideas that the city could use. Well both of these conferences are like the forty year old Commercial – Where's the Beef?

The Leaders Regional Retreat partly sponsored by the Manhattan Chamber of Commerce to provide a “regional outlook” is hosted out of the region. The Chamber and CVB get a million dollars a year from the city to promote conferences in the Little Apple, but schedule their own conference not only outside the city, but also the region. When questioned as to why this event is in the KC area the answer is that the leaders will not be distracted if they are out of town. The conference complies with the KOMA,

anyone can attend as long as you pay the hundred or so dollars registration fee. In reality those that attend are most of the politicians and business leaders. Some have billed the event the annual *Shadow Government Meeting*. That inference is easy to make. While technically an open meeting (reporters



are present) many discussions are in small groups and at social events with topics that are mostly about government, favored projects and how to spend tax dollars. This year one of the Agenda items will push the creation of a Flint Hills Transportation Agency and the siphoning of tax dollars to support public transportation. I am sure the Field House group will

be discussed at the various cocktail parties, dinners and receptions.

The City Commission needs to establish a policy on travel. Any trip needs to be view from the Cost Benefit Analysis prospective. It should be fully documented with an established goal for attendance. Can we justify sending folks to Washington D.C. to lobby? Former Mayor Loren Pepperd believed that it was essential to send a couple of representatives. That may be the case, so send a City Staff Member and the Mayor; leave the rest of the Commission behind. As for airline trips to the fine city of Seattle, absolutely not, the staff and the commission can read about that one on the internet. Finally the annual Shadow Government meeting; the City and every member of the Commission should refuse to attend simply because the meeting is in Overland Park. How can the Chamber look in the mirror and still claim they are pushing for tourism and conventions in Manhattan when they book their own event, year after year in Kansas City? The event should be local. That would eliminate hotel cost and go a long way in elimination of the comments about Shadow Government.

\$11,365 spent on three Commission trips. I was able to look in on the legislative luncheon at City Hall this month. Commissioner McCulloh made a point about the underfunding of Mental Health Care in Kansas. Commissioner Reddi was concerned about providing funding increase for Social Services. Both feared that local government might have to come up with funds to help. I wonder if they have considered cutting out the networking trips and using the saved travel money in a fashion that might actually provide a benefit. After all is networking and travel the priority?

**Mr. K**