

January 19, 2016  
Address of Enterprise City Council – Turner Townsend

As all of you are aware, I have been a part of efforts to encourage you, our city leaders, to create a more open government. We have asked for many specific things, all in the spirit of more transparency, participation, and collaboration. The public effort began in August of 2015, but you all know that we worked privately as far back as July of 2014 towards these goals.

Along the way we have been met with one road block after another. Undeterred, we have pressed on because we believe in what we are fighting for, and we believe that Enterprise will be a better place because of it.

Along the way I have taken a few notes. I'll share some of them with you tonight. Each one of these is a direct quote that one of you said, typically in response to a challenge from us that our city needs to be more open.

On May 6 one of you told me, **"That's one thing Kenneth and I have always said, we're going to be transparent."**

On September 8 in a public statement at a work session one of you said, **"We are as open and transparent as you can be."**

On the same day to the media you said, **"We're very transparent in what we do."**

The last time I was here before you it was November 3 and I was asking for an update on some of our requests. In your denials of these same requests you said:

**"I think our town is transparent"**

And then the mayor said, **"At this particular point in time, I would tell you that... we feel like we're transparent enough. If you need anything, we'll help you in any way, shape or form or fashion."**

Well, as you know, I decided to take you up on your offer. I went home that night and emailed a public records request asking for the city's general ledger from 2000 to 2016 in Microsoft Excel format. I'm sure you knew immediately that you were going to deny this request, but you sat on it for 10 days before informing me. You did offer to produce the documents in a non searchable digital text format that would be 30,000 pages on a CD for a cost of \$7,500. You don't have to be an expert in accounting software to know that producing the document in Excel requires no more effort than producing it in the format that you offered to produce it in. You also don't have to be an accounting expert to know that giving someone 30,000 pages of a general ledger in plain unsearchable text is just about as useful as giving them nothing at all. It's simply too much information to process without the help of a search function. What happened to helping me in "any way, shape or form or fashion"?

Mayor, within the last week in an interview you compared the citizens of Enterprise to stockholders of a public company with you as its CEO. I challenge you to find one single publicly traded company whose financials are not available online in Excel format.

**Do you have a good reason why you won't release our city's financial data in the same format?**

**Do you have a good reason why you would charge \$7500 for such data when it should be able to be produced in a relatively short period of time by someone proficient with the software?**

It's 2016, we don't charge "customers", to borrow your words again, for emails of spreadsheets in the real world.

**Council, I come before you tonight to request that you intervene and demand more openness. You have the power. Do you affirm the mayor's decisions to restrict access to this data?**

Simply put, you cannot have it both ways. You can't say the aforementioned things about the state of our city's openness such as "we are as transparent and open as we can be"... and continue to hide behind this legalistic standard that you are hiding behind. Do you legally have to give us the information in a timely manner in the format we requested? You apparently don't think you have to. But you can no longer claim to be open and transparent while at the same time being anything but open and transparent. You cannot claim that you will help "in any way, shape or form or fashion" while going out of your way to do the exact opposite.

Thank you for your time. Could you please offer answers to my direct questions now?

**Mayor:**

- 1. Do you have a good reason why you won't release our city's financial data in Excel format?**
- 2. Do you have a good reason why you would charge \$7500 for such data when it should be able to be produced in a relatively short period of time by someone proficient with the software?**

**Councilmen:**

- 1. Will you intervene and demand more openness or do you affirm the mayor's decisions to restrict access to this data?**