

What is the role of Government?

The fundamental question we need to ask ourselves here is what is the role of our city government. When I think back to my days at Macon Junior College and U.S. Government class, I seem to remember Professor Kimbro talking about John Locke and David Hume and something called a Social Contract.

The fundamental point here is that government is created by the people to provide needs that cannot be done by individuals. It can be argued that this land deal could enable development and it could make the city's property more valuable, and as I consider this proposition I come to the realization that the individual or developer could do this and government is not needed in this business transaction.

With a few exceptions like the Louisiana Purchase and Steward's folly, I do not believe that government should be in the real estate speculation business. Yes, this is land speculation. The City recently moved out of one of the properties that we are now considering as a land acquisition. We do not have a tenant for the space or a developer waiting to purchase this block. This purchase is speculative in nature, which by definition involves risk.

It should not be the role of our government to make money. In fact, we have responsibility to care for the revenue that we collect in taxes. When I first heard the idea about the acquisition of the two buildings next to City Hall, I will admit, the businessman in me saw the idea as intriguing. Then I asked what else could the \$300k be used for? I look at the roads in parts of our community, I look at the deteriorating water pipes here in the historic district, I see the need to be prepared for emergencies, and I see the need to wisely spend our money. Then I look back to one of the reasons I ran for office, to keep taxes low by containing spending. I believe in what P. J. O'Rourke says, "Giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys."

I urge this council to reconsider this proposition. If it is a new City Hall and police station you want, let's find a developer that is willing to take on the risk by acquiring the targeted property as well as our buildings. There is no sound reason for the taxpayer to carry this burden and I feel like it goes beyond the power of our social contract.

We should also consider that this action goes beyond the limits of our City Charter. When I look at the charter, I see where it explicitly provides power to sell city property in section 6.13, but I do not see the power to purchase property for the purpose of lease revenue or development outside of public improvements. I have not heard an argument that this is a going to be "public

grounds". The fact that we have moved our Planning offices out of one of the buildings reinforces the idea that this will not be for the general public use.

Milton Friedman the American Nobel Laureate in economics once said, "The government solution to a problem is usually as bad as the problem." If the problem is how to get more space to meet the public needs of our growing city, then I urge you to not drive a solution without first looking to the private sector for better solutions.