



**SPOKANE CITY COUNCIL**  
808 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.  
Spokane, WA 99201-3335  
(509) 625-6255

Ben Stuckart  
Council President

Dr. Christine Johnson  
Chair, Greater Spokane Inc.  
801 W Riverside, Suite 100  
Spokane WA 99201

Dr. Johnson:

This letter is written to you to convey a concern that I have heard REPEATEDLY over the last few years. In light of recent leadership changes, the timing is right for me to pursue this issue directly with you. I want this letter to serve as an internal conversation starter. I come at these observations as a partner in the work that you do; as well as a major funder.

Greater Spokane Incorporated (GSI) acts as both the Chamber of Commerce AND Economic Development Agency for our region. These two distinct roles oftentimes end up on opposite sides of stakeholder discussions. This merger has created some issues for the very community that we serve.

The first issue is that, as the Chamber of Commerce, GSI represents current businesses in town. I have seen GSI oppose massive multi-million dollar projects to protect the interests of current members. This is the opposite of what an economic development organization would and should do. Private investment in our community should be embraced by the designated economic development organization. By combining the organizations, we have ended up with a Chamber that protects itself from outside investment; while at the same time, acting as the economic development organization. This represents a conflict of interest when the organization becomes a gatekeeper.

The second issue is one that I view from the lens of a funder of GSI. I find myself setting related legislative priorities or passing legislation every week. What has happened on numerous occasions is that GSI sends a representative to Council meetings, whether it be the executive director or public policy director, to testify against our actions. As a funder, I am then asked to approve a correlating contract a month later to fund the organization. While it is understandable that in its role



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as the Chamber, GSI would oppose our actions; but it is quite backwards that the City is put in a position to fund an economic development organization that opposes those Council actions. Therefore, in my service to the citizens of Spokane, I find it hard to continue down this path.

I am requesting that the GSI Executive Committee begin serious discussions regarding the separation of the Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Organization. Each organization would then be free to pursue its own goals without the conflict that has been created due to the combining of these two functions. As the city of Spokane continues to grow and evolve, it is imperative that our support systems also continue to evolve. Your assistance is vital. Thank you for your time and attention!

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben Stuckart".

Ben Stuckart

CC. Alisha Benson, Interim President and CEO  
Mayor David Condon  
Spokane City Council  
Spokane County Commission