

“Thank you for coming everyone. Today we have a few topics of discussion to go through.”

It was a chilly evening, and the sun was beginning to set beyond the horizon. The empty space within the town hall had been reorganized into a meeting room. The old, discarded chairs and benches placed into neat rows so that the audience could see me standing on my soapbox. Around one-hundred of the town’s residents had squeezed inside to hear the latest proposals for town development.

Sat next to *me* were my ministers. I didn’t place much confidence in them protecting me from an angry mob when I proposed taxing people. I shuffled through my pre-prepared papers, and decided to start things on a lighter note.

“I hope you’ve all strived to make our newest residents feel welcome. I’d like to extend my own greetings to anyone who hasn’t seen me in person yet. I’m Lord-Mayor Shane Blackwood, and I represent this county on the behalf of Duke Polemarch of the Black Cove.” There was a murmur of approval from the adults in the crowd.

“With the successful construction of our dock, and the first exports being sent to neighbouring areas by our farmers and craftsmen – we’ve achieved a major milestone in the development of the town. Everyone here has persevered through rough times, and the dedication to the collective that you’ve shown is remarkable.”

“I’ve worked hard to try and earn the trust of the community, and I’ve always strived to be transparent with the goings-on within the county, but I haven’t spoken of our ambition to make Celeste’s Landing a world beating place to live. The sewer system that we constructed is one plan amongst many that we hope to implement in the coming years.”

“However, that sewer system would not be here without the hard work of the builders and miners who made it happen. Those workers were paid not in Lune, but food and services from local people. With Lune now moving into our economy from outside, a new state of affairs has developed. It’s only natural that people now expect money for their labour.”

The crowd came alive, “Aye.” Several of the workers chanted in chorus.

Here came the catch.

I worked closely with the workers and my ministers to calculate how many Lune you needed to live healthily for a month. A family of four would spend around two-hundred-fifty Lune per month. Which meant that to pay the wage of a worker for a year we would need three-thousand. We were planning on hiring some watchmen and public works people so...

24000 Lune a year, precisely, For five full-time watchmen and three full-time public workers.

We’d futureproofed things a little by projecting more watchmen than we currently needed. The three public workers would be enough to manage our fledgling sanitation system effectively, and to assign to other projects when they had free time. Taking a deep breath, I flipped the board over and revealed my figures for the crowd to see.

“As our town grows in size, we’re going to need people who work to ensure that everything runs smoothly. It will be their sole responsibility to ensure the proper function of our roads and sewers. Additionally, we’ve heard requests from farmers and townspeople that they wish to see watchmen protecting their property from prospective thieves.”

“Exporters are the first point of contact we have with Lune entering the town. Until some of that money begins circulating, the fairest and easiest way to request money from you would be a simple export tax. We’ve already fielded numbers to the people exporting their goods and asked for their opinions on how much they would be willing to pay. The number we heard the best response to was between fifteen and twenty percent.”

There was a murmur of discussion between the people in the room with us. I held up my arm and pointed to a raise hand in the front row. It was one of the farm owners; “I’d be willing to pay taxes in exchange for sewerage and policing.”

“Aye!”

“But isn’t it a little unfair that none of us farmers can use that sewer system at present? What do we get in exchange for our money?”

I nodded, “Aside from the presence of watchmen to deter thieves around our agricultural areas, we’re also planning on improving the roads in and out of the town. That should make it much easier for you to bring your good to market or the docks. We’re also accepting suggestions for what people would like to see in the future.”

That seemed to satisfy his curiosity, he sat back down and the crowd returned to a muted silence. This was a big decision, and I wasn’t expecting it to be popular. But I was hoping that they understood that money made the world go around, and in order to enjoy some of those conveniences that a centralized government provided they needed to help pay for them.

I explained in further detail, “The four guardsmen will be organized under one of our newest residents, Donovan Baker; it turns out that he’s a deft hand with leading people. The three workmen will join Lady Lomarac under an expanded remit as our infrastructure director. The reason I brought this before you as a meeting was because I wanted to get your thoughts on the matter. In the future we can change to a more equitable system that places less of a burden on our primary producers.”

I gave the assembled people the floor and stood down from my box. I listened attentively to their questions and concerns, trying to answer them as best as I could. But some of those queries had no easy answers. I finally realized what it meant to be a public facing politician. No matter how transparent I tried to be with them, I had a monopoly on force and authority. There was an innate pressure to agree with what I was asking for.

That was unavoidable. I’d been appointed as the count of this town. It was my job to represent and guide these people to a comfortable and fulfilling life. This was the first of many hurdles that I would have to surmount. When it finally came down to the wire and the vocal vote was held, there was a solid majority for implementing the plan. The promise of security and special comforts like our common sewers had swayed them to our side.

I stood atop the box once more and project my voice, “The motion passes, a fifteen percent import tax will be levied from this moment on.” After that the meeting was officially adjourned, though many of the townspeople approached me and my ministers to share their thoughts.

Now came the hardest part, delivering on all of our promises.

Unbeknownst to them, I’d already called in a favour from Duke Polemarch and received a shipment or surplus weapons and armour that he didn’t need. That would keep our very small watchmen group in good shape for a while yet. Additionally, I had already crunched the numbers using the King’s Eye. We’d get enough Lune to cover the cost of all of our new government workers, plus some

extra which we could spend on new projects. I wanted to cut the margin as close as possible to stave off the impression that I was profiting from their hard work. Amelie was already prepared to move and make offers of employment to the people she wanted.

Donovan Baker had been a lifeline for me. He had experience in working as a watchman in a leadership position. He was the man I had quickly started to lean on for guidance on how many people we needed and how they should patrol. The farmers were the biggest targets for prospective thieves and cattle rustlers. They were out in the country, in wide open fields with little protection from other eyewitnesses.

If word started to spread that there were people on patrol, the thieves would think twice. The key aspect of preventing crime was projecting a sense of impending failure. If a criminal thought they'd get caught after robbing somebody, they weren't going to do it. Along those lines we didn't need people who were skilled in weapon-based combat, just people with the stamina and attentiveness to do the job in the odd hours of the evening and morning.

Donovan was very happy. The grin on his face was almost painful. He patted me on the back and shook my hand at the *same time*. How ridiculous.

"That went very well, I think."

"I'm honoured that you've selected me to lead the watchmen," Donovan said, "I didn't expect you to move so quickly after I said I had experience."

"Things are moving quickly in general right now – we need to stay on our toes and keep predicting future problems before they happen." Thanks to my knowledge of Earth, that was actually pretty easy to do. Decades and decades of sociological study and urban planning practice had trickled down into the dank, deep recesses of my mind.

I probably watched a bunch of YouTube videos about it and forgot. But here it was, bubbling up to the surface like a tissue that wouldn't flush. "Now I just need to worry about all of the new folks who are moving in, at least they bring some Lune with them to purchase the houses."

Donovan nodded, "I have to say, the homes here are wonderful and worth every bit of what we paid. I can't imagine how much it would cost to have a sewer connected house back there."

"That was the intent. The best way to make the town a great place is the fundamentals, nobody likes a street that's awash with faeces."

"I guess you're right," he sighed, "If only every count and Duke could be as forward thinking as that."

"Duke Polemarch strikes me as someone who's interested in making a change, actually."

"Is that so?"

"Don't tell anyone, but I think he's using our town as a 'testing site' for his own settlements."

Donovan's face lit up with realization, "Ah! I see. So you're spreading this fine work to other cities too."

"Yep. One day, everyone else might follow suit too. Especially if it has a positive impact on property prices, cutting disease and economic activity."

Donovan scratched his beard, "I'm a pretty smart guy, but I'm gonna' be honest – a lot of what you just said didn't make a lick of sense to me. I guess cousin wasn't exaggerating about the high education of yours."

I smirked, "Just don't ask me where I got it, okay?"

He barked out a laugh, "Sure, sure. Whatever you say Mayor!"

Onwards and upwards.