

July 5, 2023

Greetings Mr. Mayor and Commissioners. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. My name is David Saenz, and I am a resident of the City of Great Falls located at 216 37th Ave NE.

Unfortunately, I am unable to be present for this City Commission meeting on July 5, 2023, but wanted to share my thoughts to the City Commission. I understand that it takes a sizeable budget to operate a City of our population. In addition, we residents require and demand professional safety services that are of high quality, especially during a time of emergency. On a different but same subject matter, I also realize that there are a variety of ways within the Montana State law that allows cities to increase their budgets i.e. through grants, property taxes, etc. Since there are no sales tax or a local resort tax within our community, there appears to be further limitations upon the City of Great Falls regarding how they can obtain funding. Rather than the City spending (wasting in my opinion) additional money promoting a potential levy or bond to be voted on this year, that frankly has a high probability of not being approved by the voters; I would propose that the City place an immediate 2-3 year pause on anything related to increasing property taxes i.e. bonds, levy's, resolutions, etc.

As you are well aware, just last month the residents recently voted in favor of a Library mill levy. Unfortunately, included in the approval of said mill levy was the much heated controversy of the allowance of a drag queen reading to our children in this community through the setting of our public Library. Many residents, including myself, view this as sin, inappropriate, and abusive toward our innocent children. This budgeted item was purposefully hidden in the levy (I doubt that the Commissioners initially fully understood this issue was included) and while it was later exposed, it gained a great deal of open political controversy. The issue became so politically focused that many residents forgot, or failed to realize, that approving such an issue would increase our property taxes. Meanwhile, I am convinced that because there is currently such a sensitivity (for different reasons) of the financial burden that is imposed upon property owners, if proponents of the Library levy realized what they were holistically approving, they may have thought differently about the passing of the Library mill levy, or it may not have had so much support. Coincidentally, literally days prior to a vote of the Library levy, approval of a law by our governor was passed to prohibit such inappropriate actions by drag queens toward our children in public schools and libraries. While many people voted prior to the governor signing this bill, they may have voted differently if this was not an entangled issue within our local library mill levy. Since the levy was approved, property owners will now be forced to pay a tax based on the assessed value of their property (I believe this does not begin until the end of next year).

Now just a month after the passing of the Library mill levy, the City has announced a Public Safety mill levy. Then at the recent public information meeting of the Safety mill, it was mentioned that there are plans for a bond later this year to support the proposed Safety Levy; hence the frustrations of the property tax owners as many of those present (including myself) heard this for the first time while the City has known of this for some time.

The services and budgets within the request for the Safety mill levy are desperately needed in our community, especially if we desire to grow. The present need for these services that support our police department, fire department, and legal offices, clearly outweigh and are far more urgent and desperately needed, than allowing drag queens to abuse our children through their


freedom of expression and art. For example, currently it appears that geographically, approximately 30%-40% (Chief Jones should confirm this) of our city limits appears to fail to comply with the NFPA required emergency response time; this is directly due to their understaffing and lack of resources, and approval of the Safety mill levy would alleviate such noncompliance and more importantly may save lives! Another fact is that our police department also faces constraints directly by being understaffed and lacks resources; this effects their ability to fully perform their duty and obligation at its optimum. The passing of the Safety mill levy would give them a much needed allowance to increase their staff and programs that would affect our community in a positive way. A rational approach would realize that it is more important for the citizens of this community to have these critical services in place for our public safety, rather than allowing drag queens to further their agenda by allowing them to take advantage of our children. Perhaps drag queens should be encouraged to seek the audiences of convicts rather than our kids.

Unfortunately, the timing of this proposed levy and bond are caught up in the current climate of our property owners being frustrated about being taxed (rightfully so). I would propose that the City strategically pause this issue for 2-3 years, rather than reintroduce (should this request not be approved) a need of another levy in say 7-10 years. In my opinion, taking this approach would lead to a far greater chance of the passing of this levy and bond, as the City prudently demonstrates to the community that it has thoroughly exhausted all other alternatives means, and is now therefore “seeking to partner” with property owners for assistance in their approval for this much needed Safety levy. Please note that I am not asking for the City to “kick the can down the road”, but rather requesting the City to be fiscally responsible with this request.

Furthermore, the City might consider improving its means and methods of notifying property owners and residents of potential tax increases. Currently, initial discussions revolve predominantly with a small group of individuals (mainly City personnel) and the audience increases as the word gets out. I believe we would agree that depending on the word of mouth to spread the message, or having “discussions”, is not advisable. Perhaps a more formal education and methodical approach to the residents of how other (non-resort) comparable Montana cities deal with this situation as they partner with property owners; share the public safety budgets of other cities; show statistics across the State of Montana of how other municipalities deal with this need; develop a 5-10 year rolling schedule of upcoming requests for mill levy’s or bonds, etc. Some of these strategies and more may prove to be helpful and advantageous for the property owners as they are provided with this accurate information.

In summary, while I am in favor of supporting the local departments that are addressed in the request of this Safety levy, I believe the City would be more supportive by the voters as being fiscally responsible, if they were to purposefully delay this request and strategically plan these needs for our community.

Thanks In Advance,


David Saenz