

CITY COMMISSION COMMENTS

General Comments

While I'd like to thank the mayor, commissioners and city staff for showing support for our Second Amendment by attending the rally last Saturday at Highwood Creek Outfitters, unfortunately, I can't. No one from the city was there. Even the commissioner who makes a show on Facebook of being a Second Amendment champion, couldn't be bothered to attend. Still wondering if any of you have visited this business since this happened, since I never got an answer to that question. I doubt any of you have taken the initiative.

But what's much more concerning is the city's silence on the infringement of our Fourth Amendment which states — The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Let me remind you that this is not just about one business in Great Falls. A large number of Great Falls residents had their Fourth Amendment rights infringed in this incident, regarding things to be seized, and city elected officials and city staff have shown a total lack of concern of this federal government overreach.

I say infringed because the IRS warrant was for financial records, yet only one box of financial records were seized. The majority of the records seized were not financial records at all — they were thousands of ATF Form 4473s — a federal firearms purchase form containing no financial information but plenty of personal confidential information about purchasers. That isn't a form the IRS would even find useful in a tax investigation and those forms weren't described in the warrant as a things to be seized.

Thankfully, we did have at least two of elected officials, Rep. Rosendale and eventually Sen. Daines, take a stand against this illegal search and seizure. But no elected city officials have done so. Instead, the city proclaims Pride Month but won't show support for the Constitution. I'd say that's disgraceful.

Do you all swear an oath to the Constitution? Yet another question that was asked that hasn't been answered. Because if you do, you are failing it miserably when, as you have in this instance, failed to oppose the unconstitutional actions against Great Falls residents. I, for one, will not forget your failure.

Agenda Item #16

The city intends to increase revenue from property taxation by 4.38%
The narrative for this agenda items states: "*Additional money from the CARES Act could also be allocated to balance the General Fund.*"

Then do it rather than raising our taxes.

Agenda Item #17

The city has made a big deal over not using the inflationary factor and not increasing the permissive medical levy for FY 2021 and 2022 because of Covid. But I would argue that the economy is even worse now than it was during Covid for taxpayers. Throughout 2020, the average gas price in Montana hovered around \$2.17/gallon. The Biden administration, not Covid, lead to the dramatic rise in gas prices and all other consumer goods and services and it continues to this day.

The city shows no concern or consideration whatsoever for folks on fixed incomes. How will they pay for this and all the other increases this city proposes in taxes?

The narrative on this agenda item states, "*The City could also allocate monies received from the CARES Act.*" Well, then do it and quit nickel and dime-ing us to death.

Agenda Item #19

I'd like to highlight four strategic errors the city made regarding the proposed public safety levies.

The first one was putting the library levy on a special ballot of its own and not with the public safety levies in November. Yes, folks would have seen it a choice but that would have been a good thing if you wanted these public safety levies to pass — the voters would have likely voted for the public safety levies and against the library levy. But now, some folks who have seen the library levy pass are saying we've had enough of levies and tax increases and we are going to vote no on the public safety levies.

The second error was waiting to announce the second public safety levy, the bond levy, until after the library levy passed. Folks are seeing this as a sneaky move, a lack of transparency by not keeping the public informed on a public safety bond levy in addition to a public safety operating levy. Yes, I am aware it had been discussed at commission work sessions, but most residents wouldn't consider discussion at work sessions as public outreach.

The third error was allocating up to \$150,000 in taxpayer funds to persuade taxpayers to vote to tax themselves more. This did not go over well and I know folks that are voting against the levies for that very reason. Cascade County did their own educational efforts for their public safety levy. Why couldn't the city do the same.

The fourth, and perhaps the most egregious error, is failure to spend the maximum amount allowable of CARES and ARPA funds for city needs and instead, awarding millions of those dollars to area nongovernmental “partners,” most of which are nonprofit organizations that also get federal and or state grants, money from foundations and public donations. Great Falls gave away nearly \$3 million in ARPA funds to these organizations and a whopping \$1.4 million in CARES funds to GFDA alone— and those or just a few examples.

Those so-called partners may provide services that the city can't provide, but even though those services may add to value to our lives, they are not essential city services. Public safety, city utilities, streets, city infrastructure and the like — those are essential city services and infrastructure and supporting those services are the primary duty and responsibility of local government. In other words, the city's first responsibility is to city residents and taxpayers. I just don't understand why you don't get that.

Fulfilling that responsibility would have meant spending CARES and ARPA funds entirely on city needs first, rather what you decided to do, which is expecting city property owners to pay significantly more taxes during the worst inflation and economic upheaval in decades. Where do you think we are going to get the money to pay for this? We don't have anyone we can levy for more income to pay for this.