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090324-2

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September 3, 2024

To: All Members of the City Commission.
Re: Budget support for the Library

Ladies and Gentlemen: We are here to respond on behalf of members of the public who do not see the "renegotiation" of the 7 mills to support the library as a viable proposal. The current library management and board are not addressing the issues at hand for the public.

We, as members of the voting public, **are not** in favor of any solution which does not immediately recognize the serious issue the city has with manning and facilities for the Safety of the community.

We offer to the commission that they uniformly agree to withdraw the support of the Great Falls Public Library as a revision of conditions of the finances of the library and the special emergency needs of the city to address other issues.

The library support of 7 mills should be reclaimed by the city as an emergency action to get **all of the city needs addressed as equitably as possible with the ability of the public to pay.**

Currently the initial safety levy has failed and, in large part, there is no solution which will not place a heavy burden on the public. Apparently, the current process with the commission has not clearly shown that even with such action the amount reclaimed is a very small part of the amount which the library has gained in the last election. The members of the library are also members of the community and need to take responsibility for the fact that continuing operations per their levy is in direct opposition to the current emergency needs of the city.

As such our request as citizens is that any negotiation of the amount paid by the city is any time open to emergency action by the commission to adjust the budget in ANY way which acts in the support of the city total operations, in general. We sincerely request that the city management re-budget the city finances to put an emphasis on the safety requirement of the city as a priority in the current funding plan

We are asking that the city review its operational policies and declare the current library funding as over stated considering the improvement of the library finances and the emergency needs in the area of safety improvements and manning. Please remove the entire 7 mills from library support and redistribute to the safety needs.

Thank you.
John "Jack" and Carol Beckman

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COMMENTS — CITY COMMISSION MEETING

I fully support efforts to reclaim to the city budget the 7 mills by agreement that that the library has received yearly through renewal of the 1993 Agreement. Although the city proposed a last, best, renegotiated agreement, I ask that the city rescind that offer and instead, terminate negotiations and not renew the 1993 Agreement.

Seems there are many folks here, tonight with misconceptions. Voters never voted on the 7 mills by agreement. The 7 mills weren't part of the library levy.

1. The 1993 Agreement is not, and never was intended to be, a guarantee in perpetuity for 7 mills every year. Every year the agreement is subject to non-renewal by either party. Further, the library director and the library board were and still are, well aware that 1993 Agreement provides no guarantee of renewal. ~~They have~~ ^{THERE IS} no basis to demand that the agreement continue, merely because previous city commissions allowed the agreement to renew on its anniversary date by taking no action. Although the library director and the library board erroneously expected the 7 mills subsidy to continue, it is well within the scope and legal authority of the city commission to not renew the agreement.

2. The City of Great Falls must fulfill its basic obligations of a municipal government to city residents and those obligations are based on needs, not wants. Needs are things like water, sewer and public safety. A library, in particular a library expansion, is not a basic need obligation to residents, therefore the city must now prioritize to use those 7 mills for city needs.

3. The library director and the library board failed throughout the levy process, to act in good faith to the taxpayers of Great Falls. Voters were duped by misinformation put forward by library levy proponents, which included, among other things, the local media spreading the totally false claim that if the levy failed the library would have to close its doors. The library director and library board did nothing to correct any misinformation, which shows a lack of integrity. Given the narrow margin by which the library levy passed, I opine that had voters not been misled, the library levy would't have passed. But it did pass and when the value of a mill was determined to be higher than expected and fewer mills could be levied while still giving the library their ask in dollars, the library director and library board showed no interest in lowering the number of mills assessed to the voters for the library, which shows a total lack of concern for the average property taxpayer in Great Falls. The library director and library board's failure to act in good faith continues to the present day.
4. I question the legality of the 1993 Agreement. I can't find any proof that this agreement was voted on and approved by the city commission at that time. The agreement was signed by the city manager who doesn't have the legal authority to sign for the city commission without a commission vote. The only other document related to this agreement that I've uncovered is an agenda report to the commission prior to their vote, but there's no proof I can find that the commission actually approved this agreement. Thus, I question whether the 1993 Agreement is valid and enforceable.