

Public Safety Advisory Committee Recommendations – George Nikolakakos

1. Pursue 7 mill library funding drawback

While I fully support a strong Public Library our library is, in recent memory, the only city organization to have ultimately received more funding than it's full "ask." Although "windfall" may be a strong description our committee has received a powerful case that "life and limb" agencies are struggling to provide basic services. They should be prioritized. If an ask for additional funding is to be made it is important that city leadership earn additional credibility with taxpayers by proving a willingness to make difficult decisions. In discussions with multiple parties it appears a 7 mill drawback obtained through upcoming negotiations with the City, County, and Library would still allow for a acceptably funded library (near the dollar amount authorized by voters) while freeing up approximately \$1M which could be immediately directed to public safety/court needs.

2. Conduct polling/survey via volunteer direct public servant outreach

Formal polls and surveys can be a useful though costly tool. Great Falls is a relatively small community and many other communities across the state and nation have seen similar levy request results amid a time of record inflation. Expensive formal polling is likely to reveal somewhat obvious results and the high cost is likely to irritate taxpayers with a resulting loss in credibility. I recommend the formation of a commission to develop/evaluate a simple but in-depth survey that is directly taken to voters via a volunteer civic leader "door-knocking" campaign. A statistically meaningful scientific poll generally consists of between 500-800 voters. A group of 15-20 community leaders knocking doors each assigned 50 surveys would offer statistically meaningful survey sample, save costs, respect taxpayers, and likely result in more thorough and meaningful feedback that offers the bonus of taking the issues directly to the community in a "one-on-one" fashion.

3. Separate any future levy requests by agency & reduce request made to public

Any future levy requests should be separated by agency. Additionally, future request amounts should be reduced relative to the previous request. The overwhelming rejection of the last levy request sent a clear message that should be acknowledged. Throughout our committee hearings members consistently asked agency representatives some version of "what is the minimum you could actually survive with." Regardless of actual needs this is an acknowledgement of the fact that given the current circumstances voters will very likely only accept a future ask that recognizes the message sent and makes a lower "ask."

4. Consider a PSAC resolution requesting city agencies more thoroughly include consequence oriented educational outreach regarding funding

While there are important legal considerations and a “gray area” in having public officials educate VS advocate for funding requests our public safety officials are in a uniquely difficult position. A request from our committee to our public officials to more clearly outline the consequences of a failure to appropriately fund could offer additional room for a more direct case/approach to be made.

I'm only one of the 151 people it takes to pass legislation.

Can't make promises but can speak to a general direction and make predictions on realistic outcomes. Speak in broad outlines, even in session things change. General point I'm making is that property tax relief in some reform is very likely to come and relieve some of the pressure we're feeling. It's the #1 priority for the next legislative session.

So everyone in politics is good at finger-pointing but I do want to point out the simple reality that our state budget is not funded by property tax. The funds that are received via property tax (mostly the 95 mills) are directed back to schools and used for equalization and to accomplish court required local funding.

Ultimately, local government funding is mostly result of voters and city and county level officials deciding what level of spending VS services provided they agree to.

That said, at the state level we do control the "rules" of the game, if not how it is played so we have an important roll to play in structural reforms.

Difficult because of their "one size fits all nature and the diversity of our state/tax base which is why keeping decisions closest to the local level as possible are best.

Problem: Scenery state, increasing home values shrinking industrial tax base – gas/oil/timber/mining ets. Shift to residential from 50% to 70% of tax base. One long term solution is to

\$675

Homestead exemption – Task Force – Governor letter, offers relief to primary residences while shifting burden to out of state/non montana tax paying/higher income folks

Additional support for "circuit breaker" programs

TIFFs – Curbs on renewal/bonding/potential caps

Crack-down on AG exemptions

Curb on additional growth exemption

More difficult – forms of local consumption revenue that reduce property tax (e-commerce, out of state spending)

The bottom line is that there will almost certainly be additional property tax relief on the way to relieve some of the pressure on home owners and hopefully offer some wiggle room to local governments and hopefully our committee's recommendation will offer a synchronized effort towards solutions.

Lawsuit

Local VS state