



Thoughts.....!

Fortitude - Issues for the Old and New Candidates

The current City Commission has made progress in slowing the growth of the debt, but has not been able to roll back the mil levy or reverse the upward trend in City Debt. The debt in April of 2011 (when the current Commission was seated) stood at 238 million; it is currently (December 2012) at 268 million, an increase of 30 million. Some of that increase was due to events set in motion by previous commissions like the 5 million dollar fire station bonds. The budget cycle for 2014, which will be determined by the next group of City Commissioners, is of vital importance. The budget is at a tipping point. Last year three commissioners voted to increase the budget or mil levy, Sherow, Pepperd and Jankovich. Pepperd and Jankovich also voted to increase the RCPD budget. The majority of the Commission did not have the fortitude to continue to scrutinize city expenses to achieve a flat mil levy, something that was easily attainable.

60% of the voters supported the five part ½ cent sales tax. County Roads, budget for smaller County Cities, City of Manhattan debt reduction and Infrastructure/economic development. Several articles in recent weeks have attempted to analyze what this vote really means. Our Manhattan tends to believe that the five part issue had more to like than hate. Commissioner Jankovich stated in his reelection announcement that the vote ***“was a message to continue growing the community and using taxpayers’ money to develop it.”*** The vote was clearly not a mandate to continue the old economic development model. We would like to see the April 2013 Commission determine an allocation of funds to both infrastructure and economic development. Clearly some economic development initiatives should be funded, especially on going commitments like the K-18 project. But, we caution against further government giveaways. Infrastructure cost drive up the city budget; the lion’s share of the proceeds from the infrastructure/economic development portion of the sales tax should be used on infrastructure projects that directly benefit the tax payer.

Several issues should be examined before supporting any current or future candidates. Definitive and reliable positions on the following topics must be explored before casting a vote for any specific candidate. Reliable is the key, as some past candidates have not followed through on statements made during the election process.

Seven Candidates have filed for office. It is a nonpartisan race that should be determined by the candidate’s specific philosophy and intended actions concerning spending, the size of local government and the involvement of government in social issues. Bob Strawn, John Ball and Daniel Morgan seem to be closest to the concept of restrained spending and smaller government. Debbie Nuss, Karen McCulloh and Usha Reddi appear to be on the side of large government, more government control and much higher spending on all areas. Rich Jankovich views may be published, but his votes on issues will always be unknown as he will vote based upon the moment - as his track record provides. The stakes in this years election are simple and the choices are either a vote for more taxes and bigger government at the

local level or a continued moderation of spending and government intrusion. The issues at hand for the candidates:

Budget goals – should the 268 million dollar debt be driven down or should it be allowed to increase? Should the commission enforce the concept of no new bonds unless old ones are retired?

½ Cent Sales tax allocation – how should the sales tax proceeds dedicated to infrastructure and economic development be spent?

Library Bond Issue – should the city increase the debt by supporting the Library Boards efforts to enlarge the municipal library with a resulting increase in city debt?

Airport Terminal Expansion – should the city enlarge the airport terminal and increase the city debt?

Parks and Recreation Office – should the city build a new Parks and Recreation office by enlarging City Hall to include new facilities such as gyms?

Should the city continue to fund Outside Agencies special interest groups and other projects that are not core to the city mission?

Should the city continue with plans to implement a day care center at the new zoo education building?

Should City Ordinances like the terminated Rental Inspection Program, LGBT ordinance and support of fixed route transportation be revisited?

The recent large map MPO will result in six figure city budget increases for 2014 and 2015. How can this mandated and underfunded project be controlled?

RCPD and the Riley County Law Board consume a major share of the city budget, should the structure of the Law Board and the budget process be revised?

Should a study to consolidate or produce a unified City/ Riley County government be established?

35% of the approved sales tax must be used for property tax relief/debt reduction. The revenue gained should reduce the city debt by at least 1 million dollars per year. Should the City Commission pass a resolution or statement of policy ensuring that no new bonds are issued unless bonds of like value are retired thus ensuring a steady one million dollar per year debt reduction over the ten year life of the tax?

Should the city support efforts to build a regional field house and a regional welcome center?

What is future of fixed route transportation from the standpoint of tax support?

Should the city support the living wage?

Should Social Services actually get 2% of the General Fund budget?

Should the Mayor Join the national organization Mayors Against Illegal Guns? Should Manhattan enact additional gun ordinances?