

Shifting the Costs

CITY USES POPULAR PUBLIC SERVICES FOR LEVERAGE

What might Bernie Sanders have to say about Eugene's \$2.7 million a year property tax increase for the public library? Well, it's definitely "socialism," which is defined as a redistribution of wealth. But, it's the opposite of Bernie's brand of socialism because it enables the redistribution of wealth up to the top of the economic ladder, instead of in the direction of average working people.

Eugene's city leaders are continuously shifting the costs (library levy included) of providing government services onto average working taxpayers while enriching the elite few by giving them special tax exemptions and subsidies. Freebies given to private interests cause deficits for funding public services — as a result, the city shifts the cost of the shortfall on to the average taxpayer.

You don't have to take my word for it. The state publishes a biennial report detailing all the income and property tax breaks, waivers and credits that are given away.

The "Oregon Tax Expenditure Report" says, "The property tax is unique in that exempting property from property taxation may result in both a revenue loss to local governments and a shift of taxes to other taxpayers." Therein lies economic inequity.

Locally these losses are significant. Multiple Unit Property Tax Exemptions (MUPT) are currently removing \$2 million every year from the General Fund (GF). The city plans to expand these giveaways in the very near future to developments like Brian Obie's 5th Street Market area project and the South Willamette rezoning. The cumulative impact of tax exemption losses to the GF is staggering and can never be recovered even when the (depreciated) properties eventually go on the tax rolls after 10 years.

Eugene's two Urban Renewal Districts (URDs), Downtown and Riverfront, are draining \$3.3 million every year. Again, city leaders are already positioning for their next URD spending cap increases. These tax-skimming schemes have been draining the General Fund continuously since the '60s and '80s.

Adding insult to injury, a portion of the revenue from the levy, if it passes, will be diverted to both URDs, reducing the amount of money going to the library, but again enriching private interests.

Just to make things worse: MUPT projects, like Capstone and The Hub, will not pay their share of this levy. Not only do these rental properties get a free pass on taxes, but the people who live there utilize city services, which increases the demand for the very services they are not paying for. Even without this levy, your property taxes are going up in 2016.

New taxes, like this levy, enable city leaders to continue giving away public money to bolster private profits while forcing average working taxpayers to pick up the tab.

This tax increase is framed like a popularity contest. The city is literally banking on the likelihood that if you love the library you will reflexively vote "yes" — unaware of their cynical manipulation.

In reality this levy is the "city service fee redux." City leaders have just broken the service fee down into smaller bites to make it easier to swallow. First they float the levy; next they institute a new stormwater fee for parks maintenance; and if they succeed, the sky's the limit.

Like the ill-fated city service fee, which voters trounced in 2013, this levy removes an essential service from the GF and seeks to establish a separate and additional funding mechanism for it outside the GF. Essential services such as the library should be funded by the GF using existing taxes, not additional fees and taxes.

Removing services from the GF and tying them to new funding mechanisms leaves more money in the GF that city leaders can spend on activities that lack voter approval or community support such as tax breaks, pet projects or fiscal excesses. Like: the next phase of City Hall construction for \$44 million; 8 percent raises for upper management including the recent \$15,000 raise for the city manager, increasing his salary to more than \$200,000 per year, almost double what the governor earns; sweetheart deals to private entities; public property giveaways; system development charge waivers; taxpayer subsidies for site improvements, demolition and pollution clean up; guaranteeing profits for downtown property owners with 10-year lease commitments for city offices, costing \$1.5 million to \$2 million each year.

Independent spending oversight is nonexistent. The mayor and council are not exercising checks and balances on behalf of average residents. Taxpayers have no avenues to demand accountability for the city's skewed spending priorities except to vote down money measures which only serve to perpetuate economic inequity. I will be voting "no" until the city reforms its taxing policies so that they are fair to hard-working taxpayers who actually pay the bills around here.

Unless voters say "no" to multiple revenue-producing schemes, the city will continue to give away money, and then float levies and impose fees using the most popular community services as leverage.

What would Bernie do? ■

Bonny Bettman McCornack, R.N., is a former Eugene city councilor.

play in the indoor or outdoor play area or analyze the display cases.

One of the best parts comes when we get home. As if we've just dug up a treasure chest, my children pour our literary booty out onto the playroom floor into a carpet of books and begin sifting. On more than one occasion, both of my children have fallen asleep right on top of the pile.

Our public libraries are a vital component of our civilization where many children hold their first book or read their first word, and where the candle of curiosity is lit. They are truly special places where communities are strengthened and children are inspired. They deserve our full support.

*Joshua Welch
Eugene*

WE'RE ALL TRAVELERS

Mayor Kitty Piercy's recent comments about travelers vs. residents in downtown Eugene led me to research some recent U.S. Census statistics. The 2010 Census revealed that about 45 percent of the people who live in Oregon were born here. The remaining 55 percent — myself included — come from somewhere else. As we talk about how to help people on the streets, let's not forget that most of us are "travelers" who decided to remain here for jobs, education or the exquisite beauty of Oregon, and not use labels to decide who deserves a hand.

*Adele Berlinski
Eugene*

TEN-STORY THREAT?

You've heard this before. That threat of 10-story buildings popping up under existing city code in the South Willamette Special Area Zone (SW-SAZ) next to your modest single-family dwelling has been repeated often by planners, but in reality this is mostly an empty threat. Here's why.

To be built in South Eugene under existing code, a 10-story, 120-foot-high building must be zoned C-2 (community commercial), be marketable and be profitable. Currently there are 72 properties zoned C-2 in the SW-SAZ. If developers could have built them 10 stories high, they would have, but for practical reasons they chose not to. The market for tall commercial buildings anywhere in Eugene is weak to non-existent. The preferred profile for commercial buildings is a low, sprawling, one-story box. Currently C-2 properties are located mostly between 24th and 29th along Willamette Street.

High-density residential towers (R-4, allowing up to 10 stories or 120 feet) are not allowed in any part of the South Willamette zone under existing code. The maximum height permitted is 50 feet for R-3 (limited high-density residential).

The moral of the story: Don't believe everything you hear. Sign the petition to save Eugene neighborhoods at swneugene.org/sign.

*Christine L. Sundt
Eugene*

NOT NIMBY

Regarding Jim Johnson's Oct. 1 letter "Better Location": It's pretty easy for the entire Lane County community to dump

all its NIMBY in Whiteaker's yard. But the Whiteaker is capped out. We can no longer resolve the entire homeless or community service needs of Lane County. The other neighborhoods and other cities, especially the city of Springfield, need to start pulling their own weight on issues such as the Oakleigh Meadow project. Just because the Whiteaker is willing to look at the community's needs and *try* to address some of it, doesn't mean it *all* belongs here. Yes, Jim, *your* neighborhood is going to have to bear some of the weight of the community, too, and if this comes in the form of Oakleigh Meadow, then so be it.

*Cathy Feely
Eugene*

PROGRESS OFFERS HOPE

Sam Porter's evaluation in his Viewpoint Oct. 1 of the state of mankind provides philosophical hope to Guy McPherson's glooming predictions. Even more hope comes with the fact that, though not fully realized, the great progress provided by the Millennium Development Goals are a cause for celebration. Abject poverty was cut in half, more children are in school and AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria are within reach to control. The new Sustainable Development Goals offer universal hope in these and environmental areas over the next 15 years. Senate Bill 1911, the Reach Every Mother and Child Act, is a part of this hope. This bill targets ending the preventable deaths of 16,000 children and over 800 mothers each day. We can take action by asking our senators to support it. So let us rise up to humanity's greatest opportunity to make a difference!

*Willie Dickerson
Snohomish, Washington*

BAFFLED BY PROTESTS

I am very much looking forward to the building of Oakleigh Meadow Cohousing on the 2-plus acres of private property between McClure Lane, where I live, and Oakleigh Lane. I was present five years ago during early conversations about a wide range of possibilities for the property.

As ideas developed among the growing group of interested and then committed people I stayed informed and current through the years on the evolution of their thoughts, goals and then plans.

I saw continual, transparent outreach to the neighbors and community throughout the years. Current status of the group's plans were always available. Neighbors were personally and repeatedly invited to join the discussion. I saw opportunity for input from anyone at any time. I've put in my two cents more than once. It was welcomed even though I was not going to become a member.

I am baffled by the protestations that only started to occur when the plan had been in the works for four years, public for a year and then approved by the city. Where were the opponents for the four years this project was evolving and all the information was available during that time?

Everywhere I go throughout Eugene I hear support for the project. I am looking forward to having OMC as my neighbors.

*Patricia Holtz
McClure Lane, Eugene*