

Guest Opinions “Related” To Primary PSS Tax Measures

October 24, 2013. Dan Fowler. *Levy opponents put out misinformation* (Guest Opinion)

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DARIN FOWLER

Public safety is the core responsibility of government, and the city of Grants Pass is no exception. In just two weeks, we'll know the results of a vote on a renewal of the city of Grants Pass' police and fire levy.

It's simple: the City Council voted unanimously to place a levy renewal on the ballot at the very same rate it has been for the past five years in order to maintain our high quality police and fire services. Due to unique state laws, we have to vote on renewing this levy every few years. Levies have been used to provide our Public Safety services since the 1980s, so this is nothing new.

However, for the first time in my long history of living in this city, there seems to be a few voices out there that would rather tear down this success by spreading untruths about the levy and are actively campaigning against it using false information.

They call themselves Citizens for Open Honest Government, yet in researching their organization, I found them to be neither open nor honest. You might have received a bright, colorful mailer from them last week advising you to vote against the city levy. It was full of misinformation, which I feel is important to correct. Despite them spending thousands of dollars campaigning against this measure, I was not able to find much about them, because their blog hasn't been updated since 2010 nor has their state campaign filing information been updated since 2010.

I would like to set the record straight for those interested in the truth. The Grants Pass City Council, city officials and I have received many questions from fellow citizens since this mailer went out, so please consider these facts:

First of all, the Citizens for Open Honest Government states that "less than half of the levy goes to Public Safety." **This is absolutely untrue. Oregon state law requires that 100 percent of levy revenue must fund Public Safety.** [emphasis added] All property taxes received by the city (not property taxes received by the county) go to providing Public Safety services or Public Safety infrastructure.

They also state that voting "no" will not remove a single cop or fireman. Again, this is not true. If the city had to operate without this levy, which provides approximately 25 percent of the Public Safety budget, this gap would not be able to be covered by all other general fund dollars put together. **In other words, we could stop every single general fund service that we don't have to provide by law and it still would not divert enough revenues to Public Safety to cover**

this gap. [emphasis added] Therefore, it is a mathematical certainty that going without this levy would require a reduction in Public Safety services.

There is also a claim that the city has built up excessive reserves. The majority of the city's cash on hand is the result of legally restricted resources waiting to be used for major infrastructure projects in the water, wastewater and transportation departments. We have major obligations to make sure we continue delivering water, treating wastewater and maintaining our roads. These funds could not be used for Public Safety, even if we wanted to. It would be robbing Peter to pay Paul and, therefore, fiscally irresponsible.

This group also made false claims about the "average" salary package for city employees today. They overstated the average by a huge amount. What you will not hear from them are facts such as how, for example, the city saves money by partially staffing fire engines with intern students from Rogue Community College and saves with the police reserve program as well.

Our city shows financial responsibility in many ways. While other cities across the nation are struggling to provide basic services, and some even filing for bankruptcy, the city of Grants Pass is financially strong, thanks to honest and intelligent handling of its funds.

I have been an active volunteer for the city for many years between the planning commission, the City Council and now as mayor. I have a responsibility to help make sure that citizens' input is heard and the city provides services efficiently.

As you go to cast your vote, I encourage you to seek the truth. Once the truth is seen, I am confident you will vote yes for the police and fire levy renewal. But above all, please exercise your greatest right as an American and vote.

Darin Fowler was elected Grants Pass mayor in November of 2012.