

MISSOULA HAS A SPENDING PROBLEM

October 2, 2022

The Missoulian recently reported that the Missoula County Commissioners approved a \$211.5 million dollar budget for fiscal year 2023 resulting in a 10.37% increase in property taxes and a \$35 million increase in expenditures over last year. This affects you whether you own a home or rent.

The Missoulian also recently reported that the Missoula City Council approved a \$267 million budget for fiscal year 2023, resulting in an 11.59% increase in property taxes. If you own a home or rent in the City of Missoula, you will be affected by the property tax increases of both city and county.

The Missoula County Commissioners also recently settled a lawsuit which was the result of pay raises given to elected officials including the Commissioners who for the past four years have received pay increases, as much as nine dollars per hour that they called “Parity Adjustment” above and beyond their normal hourly wage. The Missoula County Elected Officials pay plan shows at the end of fiscal year 2020, each Commissioner was being paid \$34.26 per hour, plus \$9.00 per hour in “Parity Adjustment.” The Missoulian reported that the Missoula County Commissioners approved a \$4 million general obligation bond to pay for the settlement of this lawsuit. Again, costing every home owner and every renter in Missoula.

Now you are being asked to approve a \$19 Million bond for the Glacier Ice Rink and the Fairgrounds and a \$5 million per year Crisis Service Levy.

Later this year, the City and County plan to acquire the dilapidated Federal Building and spend at least \$40 Million to refurbish it. The Missoulian reported the value of the Federal Building is \$15 million. In comparison, the value assigned to the Russell Smith Courthouse by the State of Montana, directly across the street from the Federal Building is \$8.718 Million and it needs no rehabilitation. It is doubtful that the Federal Building will ever be worth the \$40 million that the city and county plan to spend refurbishing it.

In September of 2019, the Missoula County Commissioners gave away four acres of land next to the Detention Center for the development of a low income and supportive housing project, yet in 1996, 65% of Missoula County voters authorized the Missoula County Board of Commissioners to issue general obligation bonds in the amount of \$17.1 million for a very specific purpose: to acquire land for designing, constructing, installing, equipping and furnishing permanent adult and juvenile detention facilities, and to pay costs associated with the sale and issuance of the bonds. When the Commissioners gave away that land, they ignored the intent of Missoula County voters who overwhelmingly approved the land purchase for a specific public use. Intent is not just a buzz word. Those four acres could have been the site of a state-of-the-art City-County facility with room for adequate parking instead of spending \$40 million to refurbish the dilapidated Federal Building with little to no parking.

Has your income gone up by ten percent, twenty percent, thirty percent in the past year? That is what it will take to sustain the double-digit property tax increases and multi-million-dollar -settlement levies

and multi-million dollar bonds and multi-million-dollar crisis service levies headed your way in Missoula.

Missoula has a spending problem. The 2022 general election is upon us. Do your research and vote for candidates that will work to stop Missoula's out-of-control spending and tax increases.

Keith Koprivica has lived and worked in Missoula for over 40 years. He holds a journalism degree from the University of Montana.