

From: Sheila DeCiccio <SDeCiccio@cityofwinterpark.org>
Date: July 30, 2020 at 4:47:56 PM EDT
To: Randall Greene <rbg52@aol.com>
Subject: RE: [External] Fwd: Proposed 11.5% Increase Property Taxes

Dear Winter Park Residents,

It came to my attention that the full email did not send. I apologize for any inconvenience. The following is the full text.

I want to thank those of you who took the time to send emails asking about my stance on “raising taxes” in Winter Park. There is quite a bit of misinformation so I appreciate the opportunity to clarify.

Despite a few emails circulating, the Winter Park Commission did NOT recently vote to raise taxes. On July 22nd, we voted to provide the OPTION to raise the property millage rate in September IF financial data at that time indicates a strong need to cover revenue losses due to the pandemic.

I assure you that if the City can remain solvent and keep City services strong without an increase of the millage rate, I will not vote for the increase in September.

Here are some factors the City and the Commission must consider:

- Our City's revenues from sales taxes and commercial licenses and permitting are down. Although the residential property values have remained strong and have increased by about 3%, commercial businesses have suffered. The City expects lower commercial property tax revenue and lower sales tax revenue.
- Due to Covid-19, the City has approximately \$3 million less year-to-date revenue than expected. To compensate, the City is tightening its belt:
- 15 open positions are frozen, 5 of which are police officers. The police force will be down 9 officers by year-end.
- Key departments will be short-staffed. If the pandemic is prolonged, this can impact the health and cleanliness of our lakes, sidewalks, and cyber security.
- The City has provided thousands of dollars of aid via utility bill assistance and "Feed the Need" to our Winter Park residents who are negatively impacted by Covid-19.

City Forecast: The City is forecasting a loss of approximately \$1.4 million of revenue next year. We are looking for other sources of revenue to offset the losses. The City is waiting to learn about a new Federal Cares Act.

City Reserves: The City has reserves of approximately \$16 million. This is set aside for emergencies such as hurricanes --- and, yes, the pandemic qualifies as an emergency. Two to three hurricanes could potentially wipe out those reserves as they did in 2004. During hurricanes, Winter Park historically gets power restored and debris removed quickly since we have the ability to pay cash for these critical services.

Winter Park is the only city in Orange County that has not raised its millage rate in 13 years. IF the rate were to be raised, Winter Park would still have one of the lowest millage rates in all of Orange County.

IF we vote for an increase in the millage, a quarter mill increase will represent \$75 a year on a \$300,000 home. The maximum increase would be a half mill increase which would be \$150 a year on a \$300,000 home.

The other commissioners and I will have an important decision to make in September. I hope that the financial data at the time will be strong so we can avoid voting for a millage increase. Again, I promise that I will NOT vote for an increase unless necessary to keep our City financially solvent and services strong.

As always, I appreciate your feedback. Please feel free to reach out to me anytime.

Sheila DeCiccio
Winter Park Commissioner, Seat 2