

Dollars and Sense

By Richard Parins

I'm sure property owners of Green Bay have received their "increased" property tax bill and are sadly reminded of the Ben Franklin quote, "Nothing is certain but death and taxes." Now, in light of the pandemic and its crushing shutdown, household economies of Green Bay residents, this increase is far more than a 'shot over the bow' requiring a renewed discussion and call to stop this growing taxation track. As if this increase was not enough, a press release from the Green Bay City offices stating that Mayor Genrich, Chamber of Commerce CEO, Laurie Radke, and Brown County Executive Troy Streckenbach sent a communication to the United States Congress asking for more Federal Funds for the Brown County area. This presser was released on December 8, 2020, but has subsequently been removed from the City's website with no explanation. Granted these are very difficult times, but has the appetite for "other people's money" become the only solution for our community?

Several weeks back, the CBS Sunday Morning program aired a segment about the effects the pandemic is having on families of lower income status and the ensuing lockdowns resulting in lost jobs and income. Matthew Desmond, a sociology professor at Princeton University, is quoted "Let's put ourselves in the shoes of a family who gets evicted. We lose our neighborhood. Our kid loses their school. Often we lose all our things, our possessions because they're piled on the sidewalk or taken by movers." Fortunately, the blame is not leveled solely on lenders and landlords as they face economic realities as well, but speaks to the Great Depression-like landscape developing.

Why, in this current dilemma, would our City and County leadership not pick up the task of finding better budget solutions than raising taxes? Only two citizens made comments to the public floor during the City's Common Council meeting. Both were appeals being made to our collective charitable nature regarding the effect on families and landowners. When the budget came to be voted on, the sentiment of most Council members was expressed as, "we must trust our

department heads." Plausible ideas worthy of discussion were laid down by a few Council members who hoped to not raise taxes while preserving workplace stability and required infrastructure expenditure where possible. Were these ideas explored during the budget session? Not really. Ideas are being passed around that the entire annual budget process needs to be examined; putting together an effective process. "We've always done it like this" is not acceptable any longer.

This process may take some time, but a volunteer panel from local companies may share other budgeting processes that can and should be explored. After all, Green Bay has as its residents some of the most successful businesses in the world whose own self-interest for lower taxation may be the incentive to put together such a panel. What I do know is the current system is failing the community. The cost of living in Green Bay is deteriorating, if not for all, for many. After all, as I doubt most Council Members would admit to being budget gurus, thus the necessity for the Council Members to assemble a panel of budget professionals is a measure worth doing. Department heads may be reluctant to allow an outside look into the current process, and we could understand that hesitation. Their responsibility is the ongoing operation of the City, therefore commentary on current budget practices and calls to build a new process may not be valued.

The fact remains that Green Bay property taxes have increased approximately 8.6% for the years 2017-2020 (adding back and including the budget shift of \$1.2M dollars from the City's budget to our water bills as a stormwater cost which falsely increases homeowners and businesses payments and not reflecting true City expenses). But it all adds up to rapidly increasing taxation that could be said to impact lower income folks more than others. That makes sense, but not good common sense. The next scheduled City Council and leadership elections warrant a serious accounting of the tax raisers and support for those in favor of more effective budgeting.

Richard P

January Meeting Notes

Green Bay Metro Fire Department (GBMFD) Chief David Litton spoke about the recent merger of the Village of Bellevue Fire Department with the GBMFD. This was modeled after the 2012 merger with the Allouez Fire Department and initiated when the Bellevue Chief left the department. Negotiations began in April 2020 and concluded in November.

The merger was predicated on several success factors: Response time, Geography, Service Model, Cost, Savings, Personnel, and Physical Resources. The 15 year agreement began with fire services on January 1, 2021. Emergency Medical Services (EMS) will join in 2022, at the conclusion of the Bellevue contract with County Rescue. EMS revenues will be shared 85/15. The merger will result in benefits for both municipalities. Bellevue will avoid \$7.5 million in capital expenditures, gain reduced response times, have access to specialty teams, have direct medical re-

sponse, and see the elimination of duplicate services and equipment. Green Bay gains EMS revenues, improves response times to the far east areas of the city, and avoids the need for an additional East Side fire station. It also sets the stage for future merger opportunities with other municipalities.

Looking to the future, this merger prepares Green Bay for an additional ambulance, supplied by the Village. Benchmarks for the additional ambulance include 1600 EMS responses in Bellevue, any existing GBMFD ambulance responding to 2750 calls, or a response time in excess of 6 minutes. Other factors would include a high use or target hazard facility, or another jurisdiction sharing in the costs.

As with the Allouez combination, this merger is an excellent example of municipalities working together to improve services, response times, and saving money for the taxpayers by eliminating duplication of services and expensive equipment.

February Meeting Notes

Pat Buckley, Brown County Supervisor and County Board Chairman, discussed Brown County issues from his perspective as County Board Chair. He picked a really interesting year to step up and serve, given the pandemic and resulting issues. It turned out to be pretty much a full-time job, whether it be nice days, different meetings, trying to make them work, and trying to make the board meetings as in person as much as possible so we can have public access and not the virtual way where it is very hard to have a good meeting. There were 11 of 26 new supervisors on the board, compared to the usual five or six new supervisors.

Energy is an interesting topic that's come through especially because of some of the people that were pushing that forward. We're talking about windmills and similar things. Adding more windmills in Brown County is a real popular idea right now. The County has been trying to do things for energy savings, whether it be changing out lights for LED units and things like that. But to say we are not going to have any diesel trucks in 10 years is not realistic. What's the alternative right now? We have to be able to have trucks out there to follow the streets, to plow snow, move heavy equipment, and do tasks like that.

Pat commented on how spending the projected \$147 million collection from the Brown County sales tax was proceeding. For roads and highways in the County so far we've paid \$22 million that we put into roads. Our goal on it is up to \$60 million on roads when it's all said and done.

The Resch Expo is receiving about \$15 million and \$10 million to the Resch Center. Some of these projects got

shuffled around, ending up where they did depending on their state of readiness. For instance, the jail and the medical examiner's building, because they're built next to each other, were done at the same time. We had the same contractor up there. So that actually ended up saving us about \$1.2 million to do it that way.

The museum has approximately a million dollars towards its upgraded project rooms. The parks department was on the tail end of this. They were working toward about \$6 million. They've only used about \$600,000 of it so far.

Another interesting fact is when we started this project, we were at \$118 million in debt. Currently, at the end of 2020, our debt was approximately \$79 million. And as you remember that during the course of this tax, as you were all were well aware that we're not able to bond any projects. Our projection is to be down to about \$15 million in debt.

Pat said that he wasn't aware of any serious talk about extending the six-year sunset date for Brown County sales tax collections. Our projection is to be down to about \$15 million in debt.

Rhonda Sitnikau, a member of the Green Bay Area Board of Education, stated that she has been serving on the board for three years and she is currently on the ballot for the spring election, which is being held on April 6th. She expressed concern that the District has lost 1,700 students since last January. Anyone that is hearing that and isn't setting off alarms needs to reconsider.

Articles and views appearing in the "TAX TIMES" do not necessarily represent the official position of the Brown County Taxpayers Association. We want to encourage discussion and input on current issues of taxpayer interest and invite your comments or articles suitable for future "TAX TIMEES." Please send them to the BCTA, P.O. Box 684, Green Bay, WI 54305-0684 or email BCTaxTimes@gmail.com

CALL TO ARMS

As you know, the Brown County Taxpayers Association (“BCTA”) is a volunteer watchdog organization in its fourth decade of monitoring and checking government and its taxing - and other - policies. We take great pride in what we do. There are only a couple of other such organizations throughout Wisconsin.

Within the next couple of months, we expect a decision from Wisconsin’s State Appellate Court with respect to Brown County’s sales tax, which we have claimed is illegal. As always, we will keep you posted as to the decision.

Because of our reputation for taking on legitimately important issues – like Brown County’s sales tax cited above, our analyses of the same, and the resulting credibility with which we are viewed, we have recently been served up with a raft of new issues by members and non-members alike. We view this as a compliment about the gravity with which we go about our work and its efficacy. These new issues warrant our consideration of investigation and, eventually, possible advocacy for certain outcomes. Examples of such issues include election law reform, the “dark store” tax loop hole, property tax inequities, persistent school districts’ referenda, and others. The BCTA is organized with an executive committee of six members, up to 24 directors, and four standing committees. The four standing committees are: national, state, local/county, and schools. It is the task of these committees to address their respective issues and recommend appropriate actions, or positions, to be taken by the BCTA.

We are seeking BCTA members to volunteer to participate in any one, or more, of the four standing committees. Committee meetings are minimal and only scheduled on an as-needed basis. Expectations of committee members are that they:

- ✓Stay informed on matters of taxpayer interest on the national, state, local, or school district level.
- ✓Identify pending elections or voter actions.
- ✓Determine potential impact on Brown County residents.
- ✓Recommend actions by the BCTA organization and/or individual members.
- ✓Communicate issue and recommendations to members via Facebook page and Newsletter.
- ✓Obtain authorization from the Executive Committee before speaking or acting on behalf of the BCTA.
- ✓Serve as spokesperson for the BCTA if authorized by the Executive Committee.

If you’d be interested in getting involved and making a difference, please contact me (contact info below) and let me know.

Thank you,

Rich Heidel
BCTA President
920.655.3107, rheidel@new.rr.com

**SUPPORT THE BCTA
New Members are
Always Welcome.
Visit our website
www.BCTAxpayers.Org
for Details.**

Monthly Meetings @ **The Village Grille**

Monthly meetings are held at **The Village Grille, corner of Hoffman and East River Drive, Allouez**. The location has no stairs or steps, convenient parking, and a room to better accommodate speakers and conversation. There will be three selections from which to choose lunch - each one will be priced at \$12 (including tip.) Lunch is at 12:00 noon with monthly speakers presenting.

The TAX TIMES

Brown County Taxpayers Association
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Green Bay, WI 54305-0684

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Meeting Location

The Village Grille, Allouez

BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule – MARK YOUR CALENDARS.

Thursday - Mar 18, 2021 BCTA Monthly Meeting.
12:00 at The Village Grille, Allouez

Tuesday - Apr 6, 2021 Spring Elections

Thursday - Apr 15, 2021 BCTA Monthly Meeting.
12:00 at The Village Grille, Allouez

BCTA monthly meetings are held the Third Thursday of each month, 12:00 Noon, at , at The Village Grille, Allouez.

Meetings are open to the public. BCTA Members, their guests and other interested parties are cordially invited to attend and participate in our open discussions.

**COST: \$12.00, Payable at meeting. Includes lunch, tax & tip.
Call Tom Sladek – 499-7701 for information or to leave message.**

Mar - Apr 2021



www.BCTAxpayers.Org
