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November 24

Do we really need the millage increase as Home Prices begin rising?

There is no doubt that certain council members and city management don't like the news being put out by Standard & Poor's¹ concerning home prices in the Detroit Metropolitan Area. Yes folks, the trend is continuing. **Home prices are actually RISING these past few quarters.** Yes, we still are well below our highs of a few years ago but the trend is going in the opposite direction from that which home prices in Troy are said to be going for the NEXT 5 YEARS.

Remember the past few months of Doom and Gloom being put out by John Szerlag. How for the next 5 years, Troy Home Values will be declining each year. But what about the surrounding communities. Why does the data contradict the statements by management. Could it be that they see this is as their last chance to use falling home values and thus lowering tax revenues to justify a tax millage increase that they have been wanting for years. Millage increase's that have been stopped by past councils because of who was on the city council at the time.

Well, it is no secret that this management will use whatever means is necessary to get what they want, more tax revenues to waste. Remember the two all expenses paid for out of state trips that city council and city management took to view conference centers that were paid for with our tax dollars. How much money was that? Did the Troy residents want that conference center? I am sure you remember how the Troy residents voted. How much money was wasted pursuing that dream of then city manager, oh that's right, it's the same city manager we have today, John Szerlag. Oh yeah, and Mayor Schilling was all for it as a council member but then was against it when she ran for Mayor. Can't get elected supporting something the people don't want.

So is the data being presented by management accurate? Will home prices continue to decline for the next 5 years as presented by management or are they about to bottom out and begin rising. It is hard to sell a tax increase when the home values are rising. It seems to me that city management believes in the old adage "The ends justify the means". Its OK to mislead when you want something that bad.

James Berar at the Nov. 23, 2009 city council meeting questioned the data presented by management as have so many others. Let me raise some questions:

How much money in salary and benefits would a 5% pay cut generate each year? How much would this pay cut reduce the proposed millage increase?

Is the **15 million dollars** additional money projected to be spent for the retirement plans the next 5 years accurate if the retirement investments for this past year continue the next 5 years? I doubt it since they are based on the past few years dismal losses. If this amount is reduced using the new returns, how much would those savings reduce the proposed millage increase?

How much money is planned on being saved through privatization and regionalization? Remember that Szerlag has stated that current employees can match it. If they do, there still is that cost savings. How much will those savings reduce the proposed millage increase?

John Szerlag has also stated that people will be laid off regardless of the outcome of the millage vote. How much would the proposed millage increase be reduced from the savings each year from these layoffs be?

If Szerlag is being truthful about answering questions raised by residents to be posted on the city web site then answer these questions and post how much each of these would reduce the proposed 1.9 mill increase. Remember, this 1.9 millage increase was calculated not by how much was needed to cover shortfalls when all parties contributed but what was the MAXIMUM we could ask for without going over the 10 mills the charter cites. Never have the proposed savings from all these actions been translated to millage amounts. Millage amounts that would reduce the requested millage increase. Why? It's very simple, Greed. Get as much as you can even if you don't need it because there are 4 members of council who will never vote to reduce the millage levied from the current amount approved.

I urge all residents to look beyond the hyperbole that management is throwing out there concerning the proposed tax increase. We have a problem but management hasn't taken very many steps to deal with this problem. After all, if they do very little and it gets real bad, people will be more than willing to pay to solve their problems especially if you threaten them with a bunch of hogwash as management has.

1 - <http://www.standardandpoors.com/servlet/BlobServer?blobheadername3=MDT-Type&blobcol=urldocumentfile&blobtable=SPComSecureDocument&blobheadervalue2=inline;+filename%3Ddownload.pdf&blobheadername2=Content-Disposition&blobheadervalue1=application/pdf&blobkey=id&blobheadername1=content-type&blobwhere=1245195279567&blobheadervalue3=abinary;+charset%3DUTF-8&blobnocache=true>

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What kind of people do we have on city council?

I was watching the city council meeting tonight and once again was amazed at the ignorance and snobbishness of our city council.

First we have councilwoman McGinnis reassuring everyone that even if we pass the 1.9 mill increase the city council will revisit the need to use all of it each year when the budget is set. DAH. Where have you been these past few years? Everyone knows that each year the millage is set by the budget. We also know that management always wants to reuse at least as a minimum the same amount of millage as the year before. The difference is we no longer have council members such as Councilman Lambert, Councilman Eisenbacher or Councilwoman Broomfield who want management to justify their wants.

For as long as they have been on council, Mayor Schilling, Councilwoman Kerwin and Councilwoman Beltramini have consistently wanted to use the previous years millage IF NOT MORE. They have always argued against lowering the millage rate. Do you really think Councilman Slater is going to vote to lower the millage rate any time soon? Wake up McGinnis and smell the coffee. There are your 4 votes to keep the millage rate increase for as long as it exists. How dumb are you? The words "up to 1.9" are just a ploy so that fools can go around telling people that it won't be 1.9 mills if we don't need it. The council will lower it. DAH. Have you seen the wish list for things to get done by these members? They could use 19 more mills [10 times more than requested] and would if they had them.

As to snobbishness. Is there anyone else out there that is sick and tired of listening to Louise sweet talking and going all goeey about what a wonderful job our DPW does removing the snow off our roads? How they are the best in our area at doing that. She did it again this meeting.

First of all, it's not true. The last few years the quality of our snow removal has deteriorated. Sterling Heights does the job 10 times better. They do such a good job that these past few years during Christmas when it snows, I take my mother through the subdivisions in Sterling Heights to look at the Christmas lights NOT because they have better displays but because I won't get stuck. Their streets are plowed where in Troy you have to wait for the Sun to melt the snow.

At one time when Louise was just a council person, there was a saying about Troy [often stated by Louise] you knew when you left Troy after a snow fall because the roads were now snow covered. Boy are those days long gone. This past winter it snowed Saturday night probably 3-4 inches. On Sunday, I went to Church and every city had snow covered roads. On the way home, I drove through Ferndale, Royal Oak and Madison Heights. All of the main roads were plowed. From 9 mile and Livernois to 14 mile and John R. Then I entered into Troy. Guess what? SNOW COVERED JOHN R all the way home. I live off John R between 18 & 19 mile [Long Lake & Square Lake]. John R wasn't cleaned until Monday. So much for Troy's wonderful job of clearing roads.

Now there is a new saying about Troy. When it snows you know when you left Troy, the roads are now cleared of snow. What a difference a few years make. So get off your high horse Mayor and tell the truth for once, Troy no longer does a good job clearing roads and people that live here know that. So stop trying to justify a millage increase by saying what a wonderful job we do clearing roads when it is no longer true.

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November 20

[McGinnis now has a contact email on City's web site](#)

Councilwoman McGinnis finally has an email contact listed on the City of Troy Council member web page. All of us appreciate your correcting this oversight.

Her email is: mmcginnis@dmcginnis.com.

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November 19

[Update on Marv's PPO](#)

I have just been informed by Marv that Oakland County has reversed their position about his attending Troy city council meetings. Their position is that he will not be in violation of the PPO if he attends the Troy City Council meetings even if Mayor Schilling is present. I hope he gets that in writing, although that may not be necessary since Marv informed me that the Troy Police told him previously that they would not consider him in violation of the PPO with just his mere presence at a city council meeting.

There are three news articles about Marv's PPO on the internet. The links to these articles are:

<http://www.freep.com/article/20091119/NEWS03/91119041/1001/news>

<http://www.dailytribune.com/articles/2009/11/19/news/srv0000006866572.txt>

http://www.mlive.com/news/detroit/index.ssf/2009/11/troy_mayor_louise_schilling_wi.html

I wonder what Mayor **Schilling thinks** about all this ruckus that she has started? Some would call that an Oxymoron.

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November 17

[An email to McGinnis](#)

Councilwoman McGinnis still does not have an email listed on the city's web page showing the city council members contact information.

<http://www.troymi.gov/Council/>

However, I had a question concerning a statement on her campaign literature. I sent the following email to her campaign email. "maureen@mcginnis4troy.com" It may come back as undeliverable but hasn't yet. It read as follows:

Maureen,

I was curious whether you plan on standing by your campaign literature statements or were those just plain lies. The city charter requires the Troy residents to approve any millage increase and your voting to put a millage increase on the ballot is not an issue with me.

However, you made the following statement right at the top of your campaign literature that I received in the mail:

"**BUDGET** ...increase revenue and balance the city budget without raising taxes or losing city services".

Regardless of how the city voters vote, come May 2010 when the budget is approved, will you honor your campaign statement and not vote for a tax increase? If the residents vote NO, you have no choice. If the city voters approve will you vote against raising the taxes as your campaign literature insinuates or will you vote to raise them? Your actions will show us your true character. Will it reflect an honest person with integrity or someone who will make false statements to get what they want? Your comments during your first city council meeting lead me to believe you plan on voting for an increase although not necessarily the entire amount approved and thus showing me a flawed character. We will know for sure this coming May 2010.

Victor Lenivov

Visit my web site ==> <http://Lenivov.com>

or

My blog ==> <http://talkabouttroy.spaces.live.com/>

Councilwoman McGinnis may respond or she may not. She may no longer read her campaign email's. If someone knows her and reads this let her know that she has an email. Hopefully she will put an email contact on the city's web site. Like I said before, she can get a FREE one from Yahoo and it only takes 5 minutes or she can have a city email set up like Mayor "PPO" Schilling and Councilman Dane Slater have opted for.

Next year, if not sooner, we will have a better idea as to her character.

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November 15

Another perspective on Troy

I just received information about a new website posting viewpoints and comments as it relates to the City of Troy. I read the initial entries and it does provide viewpoints that will lead to discussions on what is happening or should happen in Troy. Take a gander and if you are interested you might want to add it to your RSS feeds.

The website link: <http://time4changeintroy.com/>

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Scans of Marv's PPO

I was able to obtain copies of Marv's PPO. I have uploaded the scans to a folder on my Sky Drive called Marv's PPO [Look to the right column on the blog page]. If you read the PPO issued and the PPO petition, the judge issued an ex parte order saying it was requested even though the petition did not request it. An ex parte request bypasses a hearing before the judge. Maybe the ex parte request was made verbally because it wasn't marked on the petition. Marv has requested a hearing on the PPO.

This whole PPO issue stinks. Marv has been making his outrageous comments for a long time before city council. Even I have to laugh at some of his ridiculous ones. The proper way to deal with his remarks if they are unfounded is to do what he says, sue him. But no. The Mayor with her friends and supporters want to stop him from making comments at city council meetings NOW. So she has obtained a PPO making it a PPO violation if Marv shows up at a council meeting when she is present or communicates with her even if it is a legitimate council issue. There are other issues that her petition has divulged and I will address that at a later date.

For now I leave you with this observation; Maybe PPO's are the new SLAPP lawsuits for today's politicians. Get a PPO and you can shut someone up who you are tired of listening too.

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November 13

Mayor Schilling gets a PPO against Marv

I guess Mayor Schilling is not satisfied with the recent changes to when the public can speak before city council. The new policy and procedure will result in stifling the public's ability to speak on items at the time they will be decided. However she has a new weapon – the PPO.

I am sure that any one watching or attending city council meetings has seen Marv Reinhardt espouse on various subjects. I've had several people ask me if he has a loose screw or two. Whether he does or doesn't is beyond my pay grade. However I have found out that Mayor Schilling has obtained a PPO against Marv. Yes ladies and gentlemen, you heard me right, a PPO against Marv. The PPO prevents Marv from doing several things. Among them is that Marv is prevented from "sending mail/other communications to the petitioner". I guess if he has a legitimate City Issue to discuss he cannot discuss it with the Mayor. If he sends an email to city council, he better make sure that the email does not reach her since it will mean a PPO violation and that would result in jail time.

The PPO prohibits Marv from "appearing at the workplace/residence of the petitioner". Since she is the Mayor, her workplace is the council chambers during regular city council meetings. That means Marv is prohibited from attending city council meetings or making public comments at city council meetings when she is present. Remember the city pays her for being Mayor and as such the city council meetings wherever they take place is her workplace.

I will try and get more information concerning this PPO but Mayor Schilling has a new method of stopping residents from speaking at or attending city council meetings. Yes folks, the Mayor might just get a PPO against you, she did against Marv. I will say one thing; this only further solidifies what I think of the Mayor and her character. What does it do for you?

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November 12

In the Forefront or just more Horse Pucky

Once again at the Nov. 9, 2009 city council meeting John Szerlag talks about how the City of Troy is at the forefront in dealing with this revenue shortfall and that cities are looking to how Troy is handling the situation. What a bunch of malarkey. Then Dick Carlisle gets up and states how he has been working with governmental units these PAST FEW YEARS doing exactly what he is helping the city do. Does anybody see a disconnect between John's We Are At The Forefront and the person he brought to help with this Forefront talking about how other governmental units have been doing this for several years already.

The fact is John Szerlag is doing what this city does best, Boast about how wonderful we are and how forward thinking we are. Tell that to the forward thinking people investing the city's pension fund that lost 28% market value in 2008 (2008 beginning market value of

\$136,757,933 to 2008 ending market value of \$97,312,156). They didn't see forward enough. It's not their fault. They have done a pretty good job in the past and we all experience some downsides. The point I want to make is that in the past we always heard what a **Great** job they had been doing. We didn't hear about how bad until it came out that we are planning on increasing our contributions to the pension fund by an additional \$15 million over the next 5 years to meet actuarial recommendations. Compare that to the \$21 million in proposed cuts the next 5 years and you can see that it isn't just declining property values that is causing all this consternation. If we didn't have the pension problem we would only need \$6 million in cuts. But then we wouldn't need a 1.9 mill tax increase. How could management and the tax and spend council members justify supporting this large increase if it was known that a major contributing factor is funding retirement benefits.

But I have digressed from my main point about the **Malarkey** that John Szerlag has been espousing. John proposes 6 "In The Forefront" options to deal with our pending crisis. These are those "In The Forefront" leadership ideas that the other cities are just looking to the City of Troy to see what we will do so they can also use them to deal with their financial crisis.

Option 1: Seek employee concessions.

Daaahhh. You have got to be kidding me if other cities haven't thought about this or have already done that.

Option 2: General Fund Tax Increase.

Ooohhh. That's a new one. Who would have ever thought of that...A Tax Increase.... Ooohhh.

Option 3: A new millage for a specific use such as a Library Tax.

Wow. Have a special tax for just the library. Sell it as such and when it passes, use the previous tax money allocated for the library for something else. Oh, and also say the library will close if you don't pass it. A shell game.

Option 4: Establish a separate Library Board and a separate millage to operate it.

Ummhh. How long has the state had a statute on the books allowing that? How many cities currently do that? Ummhh...

Option 5: Authorize use of the Budget Stabilization Fund, Fund balance and increase some administration fees.

Let me get this straight, use the Budget Stabilization Fund for what it was intended to be used for, use the Fund balance which we have done in the past (except we stopped that this year for this years budget but not for last years budget amendments) and increase administrative fees that we have been doing all along. WOW! What wonderful and innovative ideas that other cities can mimic.

Option 6: Transfer funds from General Capital to General Operating.

The old robbing Peter to pay Paul routine. How wonderful. I bet no one would have thought of that.

Are we in the forefront as John says or is it just horse pucky? You know what I think.

To be fair, these 6 options are not the complete picture. Dick Carlisle was not brought in to help with these 6 options. Those are for the city council. He is assisting with the privatization aspects. Also, regionalization is being pursued. But then again, these are not new issues. Privatization has been discussed and implemented for years and not just here. Regionalization may be new to Troy but not to surrounding communities, especially Townships.

So are we at the Forefront. Not by a long shot, but it does sound impressive. And isn't that what the city council and city management like to do, Impress, even when it is just horse pucky.

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November 10

[Public comments curtailed, You can Thank McGinnis & Slater](#)

It finally happened. Something that John Szerlag and Louise Schilling have wanted for years, keep public comments to a minimum. John Szerlag tried during his first stint as City Manager and was unsuccessful. Louise Schilling has always wanted to minimize public comments. Two years ago when Jeanne Stine and Dave Lambert stepped down, two votes of the four protecting public comments during regular business items were gone. With the election of Mary Kerwin I thought it was gone for sure. But Wade Fleming went against his desires and sided with allowing public comments during regular business items making four votes to keep it as is.

But all that changed with the election of Slater and McGinnis. Gone in a flash were public comments on an agenda item when it was being discussed. Now you have to speak at the beginning of the meeting on an item that may not be heard for hours. Also, if you had multiple items to comment on, you only have the one 5 minute block and Louise is cutting you off as the bell goes. I wonder when her friends speak if she will stop them as the bell goes or will she allow them to continue. She stopped James Savage yesterday, she better stop everyone and make no exceptions. But I can see it now. When someone she wants to give more time too has the bell go off, she will turn to the council and ask council if they should allow that individual to finish. Who is going to say NO? Since Louise didn't ask council if she should allow James Savage to finish, she better not ask to allow anyone else to finish. But then that would be asking Louise to treat everyone equally, something she is not capable of doing.

If that wasn't enough, public comments were even further curtailed. If a total of 15 or more people want to speak on any of the agenda items that night everyone will be limited to 3 minutes. Before, 15 or more people had to sign up to speak on one item before those individuals would have the time limit reduced from 5 minutes to three minutes, nobody else. Now if 15 or more sign up in total for all items and non-agenda items, everyone suffers and not just those on the popular item. But then, Louise has always wanted to reduce the time limit to three minutes for the longest time. Now she is closer to that.

So we see where **Slater and McGinnis** stand as far as listening to the residents. They want it limited and away from the item to be discussed. They don't want to be bothered except when they are running to be elected. Then I am sure they will listen to you, at least for a few seconds before moving on. After all, their time is more valuable than yours.

Only Councilman Martin Howrylak stood up for the residents. He voted against this policy & procedures change. Thank you Martin.

Just a side note, all members of city council on the city's web site have provided you with an email address to contact them, except for Maureen McGinnis. Come on Maureen, even Louise has an email address. She doesn't use her own but has a city email set up for her. Can't you do the same? You can set up a free Yahoo email in 5 minutes. I did.

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November 04

[No Longer a Top 100 city, not even a contender](#)

Do you remember last year when Troy proudly shouted to the world that CNN Money listed them for the year 2008 as the 22nd best city to live in the US? Well guess what folks, that accomplishment was very short lived. In 2009, Troy didn't even make the cut to be considered for the top 100. Yes you read me right; Troy didn't even make the cut to be considered as one of the top 100 best cities to live in. 5, yes 5 cities in Michigan made the top 100 and Troy didn't even make it to the contenders list. Rochester, our city close by was 52nd, Plymouth Township was 28th, Grosse Isle was 38th, Saline was 68th and Tecumseh was 93rd.

What is even more telling and frightening is that there were many surrounding communities that made the cut while Troy wasn't even considered in the final selection process. Listed as other cities considered for the top 100 were the following surrounding communities: Auburn Hills, Berkley, Birmingham, Clawson, Ferndale, Madison Heights, Oak Park, Warren and a perennial contender our neighbor to the East, Sterling Heights. Sterling Heights has not only been considered and made the cut to be considered as one of the Top 100 Best Cities to live these past 5 years, it has been in the Top 100 twice, in 2008 it was 61st and in 2006 it was 37th. Troy on the other hand made the top 100 in 2008 but dropped out of the contenders list in 2009.

So when you continue to hear Mayor Schilling and others boast about Troy, they do so based on what has happened in the past, not the present. But then what do you expect from city officials. Reality is we no longer are the cream of the crop. When John Szerlag says we as a city are at the forefront in dealing with our financial crisis. Baloney. The City of Huntington Woods was dealing with this 6 years ago. They even produced a report showing how they did it (many of the proposals put forth by city staff were already approved recommendations for Huntington Woods 6 years ago). Most surrounding communities are dealing with it, they just don't go crying wolf to the media like the City of Troy did and does.

The only reason the city has had to go crying wolf is for the simple reason they **ARE BEHIND THE TIMES IN DEALING WITH THE FINANCIAL CRISIS. We are not at the forefront we are in the rear.** City management and city council has refused to deal with the financial problems until they could no longer be ignored. Oh they tinkered with user fees, raising permit fees, cutting some services but did nothing on the biggest costs: payroll and benefits. They cut staff but payroll costs continued to increase. Why? So much for Interest Based negotiations. Now they are crying wolf because they can no longer ignore fiscal reality. They want to blame everyone and everything else as the cause of the problem, not their lack of foresight or willingness to negotiate reasonable and fair wages and benefits instead of top of the line wages and top of the line benefits. They want us to bail them out so that they can continue to mismanage the city. They all should be fired.

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