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January 21

4 Town Hall meetings to continue the deception

It is interesting that management for the City of Troy is planning 4 Yes 4 Town Hall meetings to discuss the need for the tax increase of 1.9 mills [which is a 29% General Fund millage rate increase]. Over the years, the issue of holding Town Hall meetings to hear from the residents voice their concerns and ask questions has been raised. Several individuals, myself included, wanted to hold them on an annual basis where residents can discuss any issue. Yet, the only time city management does schedule a Town Hall meeting is when they **WANT SOMETHING** or when something they want **RAISES A FIRESTORM** within the community. Does anyone remember the Conference Center that this city manager, Mr. Szerlag, was pushing to get built on city owned parkland [aka, Civic Center land next to the Community Center]?

Here we go again, 4 Town Hall meetings to pass out more disinformation and threats to try and bully the residents into voting for a millage rate increase that far exceeds what is needed. 4 Town Hall meetings to blow smoke and convince Troy residents to pass a 29% General Fund Millage rate increase because Troy management has been negotiating pay and benefit increases even while the States economy has been in a downspin for many years and property market values had been decreasing. Management did not have the foresight [which they now say they have] or just ignored it and were hoping that the tax gap would allow tax revenues to keep increasing hoping that the market would turn around before taxable values caught up with the actual property value.

Guess what. It didn't happen. Property values have continued to decline and now the taxable values are declining in sync with the declining market values. The gap is gone. Troy management is portraying this as something that is of recent origin and no one could have foreseen. That is just Horse Pucky. Remember, the recession hit Michigan long before it hit the rest of the US. The signs and poor economy began at the turn of the century. The states labor market has been declining ever since it peaked in June 2000. Don't you remember the "Single State Recession" term for Michigan being bantered around several years before the US Recession?

The plain and simple truth is that the city didn't want to deal with reality when it had the chance. They had hoped it would pass and things would be all rosy as it was before. It didn't happen. Yes, some layoffs are occurring but then the population in Troy has declined. Declined to where it was in 1999 and yet we have more employees than we had in 1999. Not only that, we had a greater need in 1999 for employees as the city was still growing. Homes and businesses were being built. Compare that to today where growth has stopped and has declined. The need for some of the employees is now gone and those are the ones being laid off. Not because of declining revenues. Any average layman knows that. But management is touting that as their efforts to deal with declining revenues.

If you sense a bit of frustration in my blog entries it is because of the total BS that I hear from city management. Because of my dealings with city management as a member of the Troy Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, I know just what kind of BS the city is capable of and what BS it actually does disseminate. Honesty and Integrity are foreign words to city management. It's all Greek to them.

1:39 AM | [Add a comment](#) | [Read comments \(2\)](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Blog it](#) | [City of Troy](#)

January 17

Cable TV schedule for Millage Forum Replay

On January 12, 2010, the Troy Leadership Coalition hosted an informational forum at Walsh College concerning the upcoming February 23, 2010 Millage Tax Increase [29% General Operating Tax Millage increase of 1.9 mills]. This forum was moderated by our own TV star Charlie Langton [had to say that since he has been all over local TV newscasts and radio commenting on local legal happenings]. You can view a replay on WOW - Channel 18 or Comcast - Channel 52 during the following times:

Monday - Noon
Tuesday - 5:30pm
Wednesday - 7pm

I attended the forum and have to admit the deceptions and miss-information continued. For example, John Szerlag states that Troy has over 300 miles that the city maintains. He then says that the millage increase is needed in order to maintain our goal of removing the snow within 24 hours. That is what we call being deceptive and miss leading.

First, the 300 miles includes the subdivision roads that DO NOT repeat DO NOT have the snow removed within 24 hours. In Fact, as Tim Richnac has stated before city council, on average, the local subdivision roads have the snow removed only 2 or 3 times during a winter season. My road has not seen one snow plow this entire winter season to date. We have had several snow falls. In fact, they will only be cleaned if 4 inches or more snow falls during one snow event. It could snow 2 inches on Monday, 2 inches on Wednesday and 2 more inches on Friday and the subdivision roads would not have the snow removed [there are a few exceptions such as roads leading to a school]. Even when they have the snow removed, I remember the goal used to be 48 hours Not 24. But 48 doesn't sound as good as 24. You tell me when was the last time after a 4 inch snowfall did the City of Troy have all the roads plowed within 24 hours. In fact, tell me when did they ever remove the snow from all the streets within 24 hours? Oh, that must have been the year they just drove down all the streets and removed what they could in one pass down the middle. Last year my street had snow removal 3 times. Only once did they come down my street within 24 hours. Once it took 72 hours and another time nearly 48 hours.

Second, most of the main roads are NOT PAID with city tax dollars to have the snow removed [only Wattles, Sq. Lake, Coolidge, Stephenson and Rochester Rd] are not county roads]. We have a contract with the county and the Oakland County Road Commission pays for the snow removal on county roads[approximately 70% of the main roads in Troy]. Unfortunately, we pay our employees so much in wages and benefits that it costs more to have them remove the snow than if we had the county do it. As far as the 24 hours, other cities do better snow removal than Troy does as shown by last years snow falls that occurred on weekends. Troy NO LONGER is the envy of street snow removal, we are just an average city. In fact, the surrounding communities do a better job. They tell their residents that you know you are entering Troy when you start seeing snow on the main roads.

Just some additional food for thought. The only time you see a commitment from the city concerning the 24 hour snow removal is when the snow event is 4 inches or more. The city has no commitment to remove the snow within 24 hours for snow fall less than 4 inches. So technically if 2 inches of snow falls, the city can take their time to remove the snow which they have done in the past. That's called gaming the system. That is something this city and those that run it do very well.

So, did John Szerlag LIE when he made those statements? NO. He just left you with the wrong impression as to what really is going on. After all, he wants you to vote YES even if it means miss leading you.

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January 14

A little bit more on robo call identification

I stepped outside to split some wood for the fireplace and was thinking about the 1st amendment concerns for political robo calls. I do believe the courts have already ruled that requiring identification on political ads run in the print media, TV and Radio have been held constitutional. I do not believe that delivering a Vocal message via the phone would have more protection then a vocal message being delivered via the radio or TV. In fact, I would argue that an individual has to turn on the radio and TV with the knowledge that they would be exposed to political and commercial ads. That is not the case with the phone. You would expect more protection's from uninvited political ads. Remember that identification of the caller does not mean that particular individual has to identify themselves but the political organization they represent. I have received political robo calls in the past that at least identify the caller, although I have never received one giving their phone number. In fact, the one I was writing about, my voice mail system identified the phone number as Area Code 000 Phone number 000-0000. Now somebody had to intentionally make an effort to fool the system with that fake number. More reason to distrust the information provided in the robo call, which by the way was from the "Keep Troy Safe" people.

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1st Amendment protection for political robo calls

There was a comment that raised the possibility of 1st Amendment protections. I haven't looked into the prior court cases or other legal proceedings but would counter with these points.

First, you are entering my private domain with your robo call. I did not invite you in.

Second, you are soliciting my vote. If you called me live, I could ask who you are. By sending a recorded message, I do not have that opportunity. By requiring your identification, I can verify the legitimacy of the call and caller.

Third, what right does the robo caller have to invade my privacy. Yes I can hang up but you have already invaded my privacy by making me pick up the phone. The requirement to leave identification and phone number is to allow me to contact you to cease and desist or complain to you with my 1st amendment protections if I want to.

I can go on and list more reasons but the point is your rights end where my rights begin. We both have the same rights and the law is to protect both parties rights, the right for the robo caller to send a message but protect the privacy rights of the person receiving them.

If the robo caller doesn't want to identify themselves, **DON'T MAKE THE CALL!!!**

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January 12

Robo Call supporting millage is VIOLATING Federal Law

I finally received the Robo Call going around telling Troy Voters to Vote Yes on the millage question. Sure enough, **it is violating Federal Law**. But then, I am sure that those behind it don't care that they are breaking the law. After all, since the information provided is disingenuous, why not break the Federal Law dealing with the message to boot.

What Federal law are they breaking? [relevant section is reproduced below]

TITLE 47--TELECOMMUNICATION

CHAPTER I--FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (CONTINUED)

PART 64_MISCELLANEOUS RULES RELATING TO COMMON CARRIERS--Table of Contents

Subpart L_Restrictions on Telemarketing, **Telephone Solicitation**, and

Facsimile Advertising

Sec. 64.1200 Delivery restrictions.

(b) **All artificial or prerecorded telephone messages shall:**

(1) **At the beginning of the message, state clearly the identity of**

the business, individual, or other entity that is responsible for

initiating the call. If a business is responsible for initiating the

call, the name under which the entity is registered to conduct business

with the State Corporation Commission (or comparable regulatory

authority) must be stated, and

(2) **During or after the message, state clearly the telephone number**

(other than that of the autodialer or prerecorded message player that

placed the call) **if such business, other entity, or individual.**

NO SUCH IDENTIFICATION IS PROVIDED NOR IS THE REQUIRED TELEPHONE NUMBER PROVIDED.

Who are these people that break the law so deliberately? If you have to break the Law so deliberately to get people to vote your way then something is wrong with your position.

If you want to file a complaint (free of charge) with the FCC go to:

<http://esupport.fcc.gov/complaints.htm>

It is straight forward but you need to have heard the entire message and note the time of day and date. If you know the group behind these robo calls that will definitely be helpful.

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January 04

[Why No Budget discussions if we are in a Financial Crisis???](#)

In September and October of last year, all we heard from city management was the financial crisis we are in. How projected revenues would decrease drastically. How the deficit would grow and we needed to deal with it. Management proposed eliminating or drastically reducing all city services except for the police and firemen.

Why haven't there been any Budget discussions since. Oh that's right. We elected two Tax Proponents and now the city has decided that all we need is to have the taxpayers vote to increase the City millage by 1.9 mills, raising the general fund millage by 29% and we don't have to deal with it. After all, the revenues generated by this millage increase will be more than sufficient to meet the employee payroll and benefits demands and keep the Luxury Liner afloat on Sylvan Glen Lake [sarcasm]. There is no longer a need to discuss it and they haven't. Not in November [except to put the millage increase on the ballot and pay for a brochure that is anything BUT Fair and Honest]. No discussions in December and nothing scheduled for the near future, including tonight until after the February 23, 2010 millage election (new budget has to be approved in May so we need to begin discussions in March and no later than April, gee whiz, right after the election).

I hope the Troy tax payers wake up and realize that we shouldn't be bailing out Wallstreet and the Bankers again...Oops, I mean the City of Troy. But isn't the City of Troy acting just like the Banks that were too big too fail and the Wall Street Warriors with their risky bundling of securities, hedge funds, etc. Here the "Fat Cats" [President Obama's description of them] are still DEMANDING AND GETTING BONUSES AND RAISES in order to keep up their good [sic] work. We bail them out and life continues just as before. That is what is going to happen here in Troy. Oh we will see the number of employees decrease a little but then the need for them has disappeared. There will be very little growth in our community. The population has decreased to the level we were at 10 years ago but our staffing is still greater than what we had 10 years ago when Troy was still growing, no longer the case.

I am not oblivious to the loss in revenues that Troy is expecting. I just don't believe the Tax Payers should foot the entire bill. 1.9 mills is 5 times what is needed if the city were to eliminate the excess's, get salary reductions as is occurring in the private sector. Get a real handle on the benefits being paid. Let's be honest. We have been only giving LIP SERVICE to the payroll costs (salaries and benefits) [see my furlough blog entries]. Until we have CONCRETE concessions, we shouldn't be asking the taxpayers to bail out the city for their lackluster handling of this financial mess.

This budget problem only became a crisis because of the city's mishandling of what people knew about 7-8 years ago. City management and city employees had blinders on. Even as revenue cuts were occurring, Michigan unemployment levels rising. Michigan companies going under and leaving, the city kept on functioning as if that wasn't going to happen here. Oh, the pay raises weren't as large but they were still there while private companies were cutting salaries. Let management discuss ALL the benefit changes and not just those they cite as being fiscally responsible. How about the increases in Pension benefits? Increase in Paid time off? You won't have management be truthful on those issues. Just give us the millage increase and we won't bother you for a few years. BUT WE WILL BE BACK.

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