

Vicki Ross

Westwood Resident

The following is to be read into the record

On Tuesday, August 8, I sent 3 KORA requests to the city for what should have been readily available data. Yesterday I received the records for 2 of my requests and I have yet to receive the third record. Why there was such a delay in providing public records-I do not know. I made the same request to Roeland Park for the Mission Road costs and received the document within an hour of my request. The delays in providing what should have been easily accessible public information means that I have had little time to study or speak to specific budget details but it does reinforce what I see as the need for our community to move from a business-profit model to one that focuses on a healthy community. A healthy community focus, I believe, will result in much less frustration and contribute to the power of an entire community moving forward in a positive way.

There is no need to waste money hiring a consultant; the literature supports some key characteristics ideas for implementation. In a healthy community all members are encouraged to actively engage and both the governed and the governing are given equal voice in what they want their community to be. Seldom is a developer or a consultant mentioned as necessary to achieve this goal. Members feel a part of the community and all views are encouraged and welcomed. Setting a stage that encourages dialogue among all of the members provides opportunity for the governing body to seek out and understand the concerns of the community so that they can more accurately represent their constituents. A business model that requires all information be funneled through an administrator or the mayor can only be frustrating to everyone. Publicly noticed and recorded committee meetings would be a good start as would removing any council handbook requirements that require council members or staff to deflect or defer community concerns.

A healthy community focuses its goals on a stable economy, maintenance of infrastructure and public safety. No where was I able to find a healthy community defined by the amount of dollars it brings in. Everyone understands the mill levy is one part of the rise in Westwood taxes but what about the other factors and how does it relate to inflation? I am attaching a graph with data provided by the county and normalized to reflect the annual inflation rate on \$100,000, the annual increase in home appraisals and the net rise in the mill levy when it is adjusted for the rising appraisal in home values. What you will see is Westwood's tax rate far exceeds the cost of inflation in almost every year and these numbers do not include utility franchise fees, storm water utility fees, or sales tax all of which have been increased or doubled. With a healthy community focus taxes are based and evaluated on how well the community goals are achieved. The absence of a community focus results in out of control costs and unplanned or what feels like arbitrary tax increases.

So the question becomes-where are our Westwood taxes going and how well are expenditures meeting the community defined goals? Two of the most expensive items for a city are staff salary and benefits

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and maintenance of infrastructure. Planned maintenance is pennies on the hundreds if not thousands of dollars cheaper than waiting for a building or a street to collapse and having to rebuild. If there isn't a line in the budget, there should be one for planned maintenance (e.g. crack seal or chip seal) of 47th street, Belinder and 49th Terrace.

The Belinder and Mission Road projects underscore the importance of listening to the experts. In this case the need for white lines that the public was told were calming lines. When asked, the engineer for these projects informed the public that given the speed limits in our city, there is no demonstrated benefit for calming lines. He was asked if the city could use edge lines and his response was "You can but you do not need them because the streets are curbed." Belinder now has very expensive and unnecessary white lines that have created confusion and real public safety concerns for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers. Cyclists attempting to ride legally and on the left side of the white lines now have less street and those thinking it is a bike lane are shoved into a narrow and uneven space. There are similar and even more expensive issues with the Mission Road project. I believe it is unfair to our staff to require unnecessary, costly and less safe features on our streets. Public safety/cost/community preferences are all parameters of a healthy community and should be the major not the minor factors driving decisions.

Lastly, it should be no surprise that parks, green space, and trees are major contributors to a healthy community. Whether by survey or vote, Westwood wants more green space. It doesn't look good that the governing body told the community it could only have or afford a park if the people voted for a multistory office building. Or the proposed 30-40% increase in Westwood taxes is the result of the community voting to save the park. So why is there a need to increase taxes? Is there a plan to increase or save public green space and trees? ~~Even though there was a least one developer who proposed singled family homes and saving trees on the SMSD property, they were not selected. Will the public or the council ever be informed about why a proposal with single family homes and trees was turned down by the committee in favor of dense housing, no trees and no public green space?~~ And what about the 5050 Rainbow green space that has and continues to be used as a park? When will the public be informed and given an opportunity to learn about why the mayor and council member Harris turned down a \$500,000 donation, the equivalent of 10 mills, to pay off and refurbish the park? When asked to place the proposal on the agenda for the public to hear, the Mayor and Harris refused. Councilmember Harris said he was sure there would be five "no" votes on the part of the council to accepting a \$500,000 park donation. In a healthy community paradigm the community and the council members would be informed of such an opportunity and given the opportunity to explain how their vote represents the interests of the community.

For the sake of all involved, I ask that this council and staff move from a business model to one that supports a healthy community.

