

I want to start by stating I am absolutely not in favor of raising Ad Valorem taxes. The way the City needs to raise property tax revenue is stimulating growth.

After last night's meeting I understand that some on this Council would rather the City not pursue growth and would rather fight development and want to see the current lack of growth continue.

Another way to increase tax revenue is through expansion of the City limits and annexation of those in need of the City utility services. I support these types of growth and will continue to do so when the opportunity presents to do so.

As everyone is aware the State has mandated a minimum wage increase and many in the private sector have already raised to this level. It is my opinion that all employees of the City that are under this new minimum wage mandate should be raised to this minimum.

The City has an outstanding group of employees and many are not paid enough for the contributions they provide to the overall success of the City. I am in favor of the majority of the raises proposed, however, I personally prefer merit increases targeted to those employees that are performing at the highest levels and these increases should be decided by their supervisors in consultation with City management.

It is my recommendation that the current year raises be targeted to alleviate the compression of salaries and issues related to employees that are underpaid due to the Evergreen study the City previously purchased.

I do not agree with across the board raises, but I do support merit increases.

To those who have been given the fake news talking point that the Cities proposed budget "defunds" the police I wonder if you are aware that the police department has returned to the City from the budget the following amounts: 2020- \$490,000, 2019- \$579,000, 2018- 473,000, 2017- 617,000. Primarily these amounts are from funds allocated to salaries.

Why has the chief not utilized the budget provided to fill the positions?

The Council has authorized year over year 27 officers and yet I'm unaware of ever having more than 21.

The council authorized the police department to have 68 employees and yet right now there are only 48 in the department. So did we need the positions that aren't filled or were they in place to fluff the budget. The person in charge of filling those positions that have been budgeted for is the Chief. If anyone has an issue with not having the right number of officers on the street to combat the increase in crime we are seeing then I suggest they start their conversation there.

In the proposed 2022 budget when removing the reduction in life, health and disability insurance, which isn't controlled by the city, the overall budget is increased, even though the department returned nearly half a million in unused allocated funds. I am also of the opinion

that there are ways we can reduce expenses in some areas of the police department and reallocate funds to the most important area which is the salaries and training of the officers.

One example of this is the city budgeting for 40 leased cars while operating with 27 staff on the street.

Paying for cars that sit idle at tax payer expense and at the same time providing luxury SUV's for upper police management is ludicrous when many of our officers are having to pay for their own training out of their pocket.

If reducing unneeded waste is now labeled defunding then I guess I'm onboard.

I have heard that the police department is at a disadvantage hiring and maintaining officers. With this in mind I am in favor of implementing the step pay increases proposed for the Lake City Police Department by the Fraternal Order of Police and immediately raising all officers that are below the minimum and over the next three years bringing all police department employees in line with the new step plan. At the same time to offset these expenses and due to the fact that we have not had as many officers as budgeted for over the last 5 budget cycles, I am in favor of reducing the budgeted positions from 27 to 24. This is not a reduction in the officers currently on staff and in fact is an increase of officers from where we are currently.

When those positions are filled then a re-evaluation can be done to see what the needs are and if adjustments need to be made. Not once since 2017, which is as far back as I have researched, has the police department had every position filled for officers that was budgeted. Talk about government waste.

As a tax payer your next question should be how can the City offer these salary increases and still not raise the Ad valorem taxes. I can offer some solutions.

First, we should remove some items the Public works director requested in the budget that the current acting department management have decided we either do not need or can wait to replace. Specifically these are the Excavator, Enclosed trailer, Mower lift and Sweeper Truck. This reduces the budget by \$439,000.

Secondly City management reached out to the County about consolidating our dispatch departments so that all fire and police dispatch can be handled from one centralized location. This will provide better services for City residents and City businesses. It will alleviate the issue of citizens having to explain their emergency to multiple dispatchers, when time and response are so critical, it will allow for police and fire departments having an increased situational awareness of what is going on in the surrounding area as well as providing the same advantage to the Sherriff.

The County is willing to take on this function and all City employees currently in these positions. Under the proposal we are making they would provide this service for \$250,000 annually for 4 years and then take on the responsibility of the costs going forward from there. This will reduce City expenses by roughly \$600,00 annually.

Currently the city is struggling to fill these most important positions, and in some cases have needed police officers to fill them while on overtime. This is a commonsense solution that reduces expenses and at the same time increases services to the residents and businesses of Lake City.

Altogether these changes will reduce the 2022 budgeted expenses by approximately \$1,000,000.