

December 28, 2015

Letter to the Editor:

In recent months, Wichita Mayor Jeff Longwell and Councilman Pete Meitzner have talked about changing the county-wide sales tax distribution formula so the city residents get their “fair share.” They want Sedgwick County to hand over \$17.8 million (of our \$29.2 million share) in sales tax, to use in some unknown way. Over the last few months, we have been patient communicating with Wichita elected officials, to better understand their needs -- we still aren’t sure. But, it’s time to share more of the facts, rather than just hearing another funding scheme to replace the failed November 2014 Wichita sales tax effort.

First, the current one percent county-wide sales tax was the result of a county-wide public vote in 1985. The Chamber and Wichita City Council came to the Board of County Commissioners requesting a county-wide vote, for both property tax relief and their desire to expand Kellogg. The county-wide sales tax was approved by voters, with municipalities passing ordinances guaranteeing how the receipts would be used -- 50% for property tax relief and 50% for new road construction. No other city in Sedgwick County is complaining about not getting its “fair share.”

Mayor Longwell asserts that Wichita should get a larger share of the total county tax receipts. The claim is that “city residents” contribute \$77.2 million of the total \$102.1 million collected, but they only get \$59.4 million back. This is completely false. First, “city residents” are not the only ones to pay sales tax – anyone who shops in businesses in the county pays the tax. In recent Eagle articles, the Wichita Mayor and businesses acknowledge that outside visitor activity makes a significant impact. The recent Garth Brooks concerts showed 60% of ticket buyers from outside of Wichita; and the Book of Mormon event brought in 30% of out-of-towners. Even the “Vote Yes” campaign claimed in the failed November 2014 sales tax effort that an estimated 33% of a Wichita sales tax would be paid by people who live OUTSIDE of Wichita.

So, Wichitans alone aren’t generating \$77.2 million in sales tax -- residents who live in the 19 other cities in Sedgwick County, the unincorporated areas, surrounding counties and visitors to our community are also paying in to the sales tax total.

The Mayor also demands the City of Wichita get a larger share, beyond the \$59.4 million it already receives. This is a myopic view. If it’s about entitlement, then Wichita should also be entitled to deliver all of the services to its citizens – including services Sedgwick County currently provides to all municipalities – 911, EMS, Juvenile and Adult Corrections, COMCARE, Health and more. Of these county-wide services, the users are predominantly from Wichita. So, does the City of Wichita want to also take on this \$106.5 million expense?

Here’s the reality: the City of Wichita can’t figure out how to take care of roads, transit and water without looking for additional revenue. They clearly don’t want to raise property taxes, or reduce services, but they do want Sedgwick County to give up resources for the City’s lack of financial planning. The current distribution formula works, and we should continue to uphold the voters trust. If the City

now wants money for roads, transit, the water system or other needs, they either need to engage the community with a Wichita sales tax, raise their property taxes or reallocate their existing resources. It's about priorities, and it's about public trust.

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