

Information from the Concerned Citizens of St. Tammany

The original Jail and Justice tax was for 20 years to acquire land, construct the facilities, maintain and operate the facilities and pay off the debt. It has done all of that. **It was never intended to be renewed into perpetuity. The parish has had 20 years to come up with a long-range plan, and it has not.**

But 40% of the proposed “renewal” is money to “acquire and construct” beyond what was ORIGINALLY voted on.

The parish has hired a Public Relations firm to “rebrand and educate” the voters for this third vote with \$77,000 of your tax dollars. That’s on top of advertising and election costs incurred with these three proposals, and countless hours and dollars of “staff” time to push this issue, and the costs of 3 elections.

Vigorous research shows many areas where **revenue is already available from existing sources**. This includes but is not limited to deferring low-priority “wants not needs,” eliminating excessive employee growth, excessive legal department growth (from 2 to 16), generous 10% pay raises, and elimination of waste.

Voters should vote NO to both the Jail and Justice Center taxes and require a vote on only the **Maintenance and Operations as BGR suggested**. Otherwise, we have ‘taxation without representation.’

We do not need the proposed \$15 million parking garage nor a storage building of an unknown amount when rental storage will suffice for now. Besides, 7 years ago we built a parking garage that included offices **AND STORAGE SPACE**.

Rhonda & Special Courts

To support the Justice Center tax renewal the Parish has produced a video entitled “Rhonda” who is a reformed substance-abuse person who used a Specialty Court (funded by Federal and State grants, not St Tammany).

However, this is an obvious attempt to employ anecdotal emotionalism to distract St Tammany Citizens from understanding the basic financial issues about the tax. For example, each of the 7 named Special Courts will receive only about 1.4% of the total levy revenue per year, and to over-fund what is already adequately funded by Federal and State grants.

Again, the Specialty Courts are funded by Federal and State grants. St Tammany has not paid a penny, ever, but now hopes that you are gullible enough to notice that this is a simply ‘hook’ to play on your sympathy and their untruths.

If the Parish believes strongly in these Specialty Courts then why not fund them independent of the Jail and Justice Center taxes, and let the voters decide? This issue should not be co-mingled with other issues. **BGR also suggest separate votes on these issues.**

Quality of Life?

The parish wrongly claims this is a “quality of life issue.” If high taxes bring a high quality of life, we should all move to Orleans Parish where the tax per capita is higher than St Tammany’s. Further, our quality of life can be enhanced if the Parish simply curbed its excessive employee growth, excessive and

astonishing legal department growth, excessive Coroner spending that dwarfs benchmark parishes, and other overspending that saps funds that can truly enhance the quality of life for all St Tammany citizens and perhaps even lower taxes as well.

The Jail and Crime Reduction:

Sheriff Randy Smith has said: "THERE WILL BE NO REDUCTION IN PUBLIC SAFETY IF THESE TAXES DON'T PASS. Please re-read that.

Sheriff Smith also said he would not need new taxes (but he has rolled up mileages anyway) as he could meet his needs just from the "waste" he alleged in his election speeches. He now sings a different song.

Sheriff Smith touts the crime reduction in St Tammany and pins this to the tax levy.

However, this is not quite accurate. For example, violent crime across the entire US has been in steady decline since well before these tax levies existed and well before Jail additions were in place.

Since 1993, reported violent crime in the US has declined about 50% in the US (2015). So it would be difficult to segregate Parish crime performance from national trends.

We need a jail, but not an 1100 bed prison to house state and federal inmates.

There are many areas to reduce costs and fund from existing sources which require NO tax renewal or tax continuations into perpetuity. After 10 years, they'll be back again to renew again. And then another 10. And then another 10.

Here are some areas to make reductions so MORE TAXES are not needed.

Excessive attorneys & staff, from 2 to 16, \$1.1 million and growing

Excessive number of employees per capita compared to benchmark parishes.

Excessive employee growth versus population growth – some 250% higher employee growth than population growth (per the state & US Census and the parish's own records).

Excessive pay raises of 10.02% pay raise in 2017, and more like **14%** when some 100 fewer employees (workforce reduction) taken into account plus another 2.4% in 2018. (\$50k each average x 100 = \$5,000,000.) These stats are from the parish's own financial records and published budgets.

Nor were the "Maintenance and Operations" intended to be funded into perpetuity. **The parish has had 20 years to come up with a long-range plan and the parish has failed.** It sought a 20-year renewal and failed. It sought a 10-year renewal and failed. Now it's seeks still another 10-year renewal. And in 10 years, it will be back AGAIN, and AGAIN, and AGAIN.

Nor was our vote intended for such things as Parking Lots or storage buildings or expanding the top floor or buying church property. **Those items should be voted on SEPARATELY and not deceptively co-mingled with a dubious renewal every 10 to 20 years.**

One reason for so much resistance is because there is so much mischief, misstatements, misleading pie charts that are full of errors and confusing hard-to-follow "Interfund Transfers" and anything but transparency.

These were to be DEDICATED TAXES – not a vehicle to squirrel secret additions for parking lots, floor build outs, additional storage centers, purchase church properties, unnecessary re-sodding, etc **and not to be raided by Interfund Transfers**. These taxes should require a separate vote just like the original tax required a separate vote.

But here is a suggestion:

Funding for Maintenance and Operations can come from a source that is OVER FUNDED NOW. That's the CORONER'S OFFICE. His revenues are FAR higher than Coroners in benchmark parishes, even after allowing for those who do or don't do autopsies for their own parish. We should rededicate the excessive amounts given to the CORONER to help fund the Justice Center Maintenance and Operations. THIS REDEDICATION of existing taxes has the **TRIPLE BENEFIT** of (1) reducing waste in one department and (2) simultaneously funding another and (3) providing the parish with a much-needed LONG-RANGE PLAN that eliminates endless renewals.

Data References:

US Census, Louisiana Auditor/Yearly Government Wide Financial Statements, Louisiana Department of Revenue, Louisiana Tax Commission.