



Opinion - Friday, January 28, 2011

Parents' seek share of taxes for schools

by Jim Pollart

Many thanks to the *Voice* for last week's editorial which focused on the city's two redevelopment districts — the Downtown District and the Shoreline District (which covers Shoreline/North Bayshore, and is home to Google, Microsoft and other high tech companies).

To understand why these redevelopment districts are important, you need to understand their history and their impact on school funding. These districts were created in 1969 to promote redevelopment within their boundaries. At that time, the downtown was blighted and Shoreline was a garbage dump. To finance redevelopment, the districts were authorized to keep a large share of future property tax revenues, with the idea that the money would be reinvested within their boundaries.

Now fast-forward 42 years. Today, both downtown and Shoreline are fully built out, and are the cleanest, most vibrant sections of town. By any measure, both districts have been extremely successful. But, though their work is largely completed, the districts continue to keep almost all property taxes within their boundaries. As a result, these districts have become cash cows for the city, generating millions of dollars of excess cash every year.

For example, at the end of this fiscal year, Shoreline will have a \$31 million cash balance in its operating fund. Money from Shoreline is being used for projects located miles outside of the physical boundaries of the district. The downtown district has \$5.5 million in available cash, and is considering using \$2 million to subsidize a downtown grocery store.

Now here's the rub. Roughly 40 percent of the property taxes from these districts would normally go to local schools. So by keeping those property taxes, the districts are taking money directly from our schools. The amount of lost school funding is staggering. This year alone, Shoreline and Downtown will divert over \$10 million in funding from our schools. Those lost property taxes, combined with state budget cuts for education, are forcing Mountain View's schools to make drastic cuts in basic programs and services — cuts that affect every child, every day.

The Downtown District is scheduled to sunset this year, but the city council is considering a further two-year extension. Even more worrisome, the much larger Shoreline District is currently set up to live forever.

The good news is that our city manager and City Council have recently decided to take a fresh look at both redevelopment districts. But because the districts' funds are controlled and managed by the city, there will be powerful incentives among city leaders to stick with the status quo.

We are a group of parents who have mobilized to lobby the City Council to share more Shoreline and downtown district funds with our schools. Our goal is to organize a large group of school supporters for this effort. We need your help to persuade our City Council that the time is now to wind down our obsolete redevelopment districts and shift more property taxes to our schools.

In its editorial last week, the *Voice* predicted, "As it becomes clear how little the city needs these special tax districts there will be increasing pressure to dedicate the money to schools." That's where we come in. It will be a challenge, but the amount of money at stake is huge.

If you are a school supporter, we need your help. Please visit our Facebook page at ShareShoreline or send us an email at ShareShoreline@gmail.com. We will send you information on how you can help, and we promise we won't share your personal information with anyone.

This is one of the most important issues for our schools in many years. If you ever considered getting involved to support our schools, the time is now. Keeping our schools strong is vital to the success of our city. Not only do our schools need to deliver the workforce of tomorrow, they must also turn out curious and caring young adults with visions for the future. Let's help keep schools strong ... by keeping them well-funded.

Jim Pollart lives on Emerson Lane

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