

# Gresham Butte Neighborhood Association

February 10, 2021

Officers present: Jim Buck, President; Sandy Davidson, Vice-President; Theresa Tschirky, Treasurer; Tracy Slack, Land Use Chair; Lynn Saint, Secretary.

## 7:04 p.m. Meeting Called to Order

Approximately 17 individuals, not all from GBNA, participated throughout most of the meeting. Michael Gonzales, the City of Gresham Neighborhood Community Enhancement Manager, sat in as a participant on the Zoom connection.

## 7:05 p.m. Financial Challenges of the City of Gresham

To clarify the meeting's purpose, Chairman Jim Buck explained there has been a deterioration in the **tax situation in Gresham**. We are paying 29 cents of every tax dollar to the County while the City of Gresham only receives between 23-24 cents per tax dollar. To point out the disparity, he explained, "If we were living in Portland, a greater percentage on the dollar would be received in Portland." He further referenced last month's presentation about increasing revenue with the comment, "People do not like having additional fees and are refusing to vote for bonds. How can we make the legislature understand that we need to fund the city?"

Jim Buck had joined a panel regarding tree climates a day prior. A Bozeman, Montana representative told him they have five arborists on their city staff. Gresham does not employ one arborist. **Critical services are deficient in the City of Gresham**. "Is there any way to help galvanize efforts?"

## 7:07 p.m. Introductions

**District 50 State Representative Ricki Ruiz** joined us with his two legislative aides, Amanda Orozco-Beach and Omar Sandoval. He asked for a quick round of introductions with attendees who were to explain their length of stay in Gresham. People have lived here, ranging from seven years to 78 years; some have resided here only a few years and others their entire lives.

Rep. Ruiz explained some of his background as a 26-year resident and an advocate through neighborhood associations, mainly in Rockwood. To read more of his interests, one can gain access to the web page at <http://www.oregonlegislature.gov/ruiz>. He can also be reached via email at [rep.RickiRuiz@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:rep.RickiRuiz@oregonlegislature.gov)

## 7:25 p.m. Tax Measures

"**Measures 5 and 50 have caused problems** for Gresham residents." Ruiz lamented. "Before the measures were introduced, 20 percent of Gresham police services were funded through the general fund. Eighty percent of police funding comes out of the general fund, now." He continued, "Measure 50, at the time of its passing into law, may have been a good idea, but now it has become cumbersome. We don't have half the amenities of similar-sized towns such as Beaverton, Tualatin and Eugene. One example is the lack of a parks and recreation department. There isn't a magic solution to fix Measures 5 and 50. There has been discussion about changing

the constitution to adjust the measures. Amending the constitution would enable the City of Gresham to gain more funding for programs which are vitally important.”

A few months ago, Ruiz learned that **Gresham Police do not have a full-time jailer**. A temporary facility is located next to City Hall, available only Monday through Thursdays. Without a full-time jailer, those arrested are taken to downtown Portland. The City is way understaffed as individuals take on roles requiring two to three people to fill. We can be high quality with the programs we have. The City takes great pride in its successes, but it needs more assistance.

Gresham is a city noted by diverse cultures. “Within the boundaries of the city, 80 languages are spoken.” Ruiz revealed.

What ideas are available? **What steps need to be taken to help the City of Gresham receive the proper funding?** Changing property taxes is another hot topic. Open-minded conversations need to happen to achieve a best-case scenario to make changes within the city.

He asks what people think about the measures and how the association feels about it. He invited listeners and participants to reach out via email.

#### 7:38 p.m. Questions and comments from participants and attendees

Jim Buck-- “We are **more concerned about where the monies are going** from our property taxes. **Why isn’t the money staying here?**”

Tracy Slack-- “Legislation has come up over a number of years. Is there now a renewed sense of urgency? Are all the players at the table?” One of his main fears is that **reluctance to collaborate is destroying momentum before it gets underway**. “How can there be a way to get everyone to step up?”

**Response:** Rep. Ruiz – “**There is an urgency on the part of those who need to address this**. The City of Portland, the State and the County officials are talking. **The City of Gresham may not yet be at the table**. A commissioner has been trying to get a meeting set up since early December. Ideally, there will be a forward move to address equity. What is the best way to make sure our money stays here? Let’s make sure there is a plan in place. It would help to have a five-year plan.”

Tracy Slack-- “**What are the main issues?** Is there a cap on dollars? There has been a vice tightening around us. Housing values and market assessments have not been adequately evaluated. Gresham and East County may be in the most severe situations in the state with the most disparity of housing values. Are there other cities complaining about this?”

**Response:** Rep. Ruiz – “Downtown Portland and West Portland have great riches. **Gresham is feeling this the worst**. There is disparity. What do we need to do as community members to stay educated?”

Participant Sue R.— “One of the issues being looked at is the **point of sale assessment**. New residential buildings have an unusual calculation. Some places are paying half the property taxes of homes nearby. For example, new homes may be paying \$3,000 in taxes on a home priced at \$400,000. Old homes with less value are paying more taxes – up to \$5,000. Not too long ago, every seven years, tax assessors used to go out and appraise, putting all the homes on the same footing. There needs to be an option to update the roles. Inequity is very hard. People in older homes are paying more than those with better means.

“I contested the initial valuation and won the appeal a few years ago. Gresham had been hit the hardest. They look at new homes, valued at 70% of assessed value. At that time, and

maybe still, there was an imbalance according to the county assessor, the person who assessed her home.

Participant John – “Do you get a sense there are **representatives who are anti-change?**”

**Response:** Rep. Ruiz – “Some do not want change. Some are in the middle and want to see how the measures are affecting the State and local areas. Some want change right away.”

Participant John – “**Is there a way to let the naysayers know what is happening?**”

**Response:** Rep. Ruiz – “Saying this should go to legislation could produce a change. Having a testimony from Gresham residents... would be crucial to bringing about change.”

Jim Buck – “**Are there equity issues?** Can these be challenged in court? They cannot be challenged on their constitutionality. We don’t have property redress to address the inequity, unless through legislation”

Tracy Slack – “The work plan, round table meeting addresses these issues. **Our budget crunch is Job 1 in the City of Gresham.** What things can neighborhood organizations do to bring about an awareness within the City? This has been acute need for the past few years. The City of Gresham is not replacing people who leave.”

**Response:** Rep. Ruiz suggested, “The neighborhood association can draft a letter to ask the legislators to help with changing the inequity. Urging legislators to look into the inequity ASAP about the unfair allocations of funds outside of the City requires addressing this. There is a sense of urgency. **What will an email look like to a legislator?** It could get messy.”

Jim Buck – “One of the authors of the measure indicated he regretted what had happened with the passing of the measures. Other neighborhoods need to address this effort. There needs to be a proposal put together with more than one group.”

Mary Ann Buck – “**With the inequities in Gresham, why don’t other cities have the same issues?** Do these only affect Gresham?”

Jim Buck – “Differences in valuation increase occurs around the County. There’s a huge disparity in property valuations. Are there other jurisdictions where this is an issue? Tax limits that were set – compression puts us in this predicament. Washington County has different scenarios.

Theresa Tschirky – Gresham had a tax that expired the day before the cut off. Tualatin had already put Parks and Recreation into their budget. Gresham had an artificially low level. There is a **combination of several factors.**”

Tracy Slack – “Eric Chambers had analyzed this to try to reconcile these issues. How successful has this been? **We should build on and analyze from what was done before.** City and neighborhood minutes should show some of the studies about the City in this regard.”

**Response:** Rep. Ruiz – “Brian Monberg should also have some input as they look at the archives.

James Buck – “**We may be looking at millions of dollars which are leaving the City.**”

**Response:** Rep. Ruiz – “It’s worth having the conversation with those involved.”

#### 7:55 p.m. Reports

**Treasurer Theresa Tschirky** stated there was an amount of \$2, 104.15 in the treasury. She also noted the City of Gresham had sent out a 1099 tax statement for the first time.

**Land Chair Tracy Slack** reported, “No activity.”

#### 8:00 p.m. Old Business

According to Jim Buck, “**Two work parties** have gathered to **cut the blackberry overgrowth**. Bent over young trees, planted by the City, have been overwhelmed by blackberry canes. This is slow going with 40-man hours of cane cutting.” He anticipates another two or three work parties. Removing the canes has resulted in rescuing the young trees. Hopefully, the City will assist in the ordering of plant/tree/shrub materials for new plants to be established. To clear the area, roots can be dug out until they can be shaped out. This should take a few years. To help the growth in warmer months, a water truck may be used to hydrate the plantings.

#### 8:05 p.m. New Business

**Our next meeting** is scheduled for **March 10**. The City has asked the Coalition if neighborhoods could have sessions with the **Urban Forest Subcommittee**. The City wants the subcommittee to develop a relationship with each neighborhood to gain input from each one about implementing a plan for tree planting. The presentation should take about half an hour to thirty-five minutes.

Sandy suggested a group letter to the State legislature be written regarding the possibility of looking into the tax measures and how to better finance the City treasury.

A report by Eric Chambers to the GBNA was posted for the March 13, 2019 meeting regarding the tax situation under Measures 5 and 50. For those interested, it should be on the city website for that date. Chambers had also spoken more at length to the Coalition on February 12, 2019 regarding the same issue.

#### 8:15 p.m. Adjournment