



Is there really a need for a Metropolitan Park District to support the Friends Of The Pool's over \$20 million dollar Methow Aquatics Complex???

<http://nopooltaxes.com>

Methow Valley News 7/19/2023 issue had a "My Turn" letter and two other "Letters to the Editor" regarding the Methow Aquatics Complex and its funding mechanisms.

Property is no longer needs. See LETTERS, A5

MY TURN

A few things to consider about a Methow Aquatics District

BY RAY PETERSON

I bought property here in the valley in 1996 and built a house in 2006 to retire and live full time. I also served on the board of the Okanogan County Electric Cooperative for several years. My goal has always been to strive for residents of the valley to be aware of all information concerning infrastructure and to be treated fair economically, whether it was electrical rates and now future taxes.

Whether we really need an over \$20-million pool complex is debatable. I will not address that here. I am here to address the formation of an Aquatics District under Proposition 1.

Friends of the Pool had listed four alternatives in their feasibility study to select a funding mechanism for a pool complex costing more than \$20 million. They chose a Metropolitan Park District format called the Aquatics District. After further study, I determined this format for a district to be the most toxic to local property owners and renters. It will be especially hard on limited-income folks and senior citizens on social security.

A Metropolitan Park District may under Washington Law 35.61 RCW:

- Tax your property at up to 75 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value — \$300 per year for a \$400,000 house, \$525 for a \$700,000 house, \$750 for a \$1million house. Every year. Rents will also raise accordingly.
- Purchase, acquire and condemn lands within or without the boundaries of park district. (Friends of the Pool say they are excluding eminent domain for the Aquatics District.)
- Issue and sell warrants, short- term obligations, or general obligation bonds.
- Issue revenue bonds.
- Petition for the creation of local improvement districts.

- Employ counsel, provide for park police officers, secretary of the board, and all necessary employees. Establish civil service for employees.
- Regulate, manage and control, improve, acquire, extend and maintain, open and lay out, parks, parkways, boulevards, avenues, aviation landings and playgrounds, within or without the park district
- Annex territory.

Friends of the Pool does not have a final design nor a final cost for the future pool, but they will want us to vote on the formation of this very powerful and permanent Aquatics District. Proposition 1 will be on the November ballot if they get enough signatures by Aug. 1, and is specifically for the formation of the Methow Aquatics District. More importantly, the proposal would create a permanent taxation district that will have several mechanisms for taxing us. We, the voters, will have no further say about it other than to pay our property tax statement. This is also the organizational structure that will allow Friends of the Pool to raise the largest amount of money with the least amount of public input.

Friends of the Pool says the district would be governed by a five-member board appointed by the Okanogan County Commission and the Twisp and Winthrop Town Councils as provided by interlocal agreement approved by the three jurisdictions. Note that this is not an elected board.

Thoroughly study and learn about Proposition 1 and the Methow Aquatics District. For more information, I have a website at <http://nopooltaxes.com> structured with the laws and commentary on Proposition 1 and the Aquatics District.

Ray Peterson lives in Winthrop.

Tax impacts

Dear Editor:

There are several tax systems that states use to fund state and local government programs, with income taxes being one of the most progressive and property taxes being one of the most regressive. Unfortunately, Washington state has one of the most regressive tax policies in America.

While I am not advocating a change in our tax system, I am writing to draw attention to how much more lower-income people will be affected by the Friends of the Pool proposal to raise property taxes to fund the operation and construction of their two pools (and hot tub area). A levy of up to a whopping 75 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value could be assessed every year, and possibly more if Friends of the Pool needs a separate levy to pay for construction costs not covered by both grant money and construction debt issued by the Metropolitan Park District. Lower-income people forced to hand over a higher percentage of their income in taxes to fund the pools will likely end up getting less (if anything) in return, as some likely won't be able to afford a pool membership.

The Methow has changed greatly over the past 50 years, as more and more people with money have moved here. The high prices they pay for homes has raised property taxes on many who have lived here for many years, those who are house rich but whose income is shrinking due to the huge tax increases. The very expensive pool proposal seems to me to be another assault on the less wealthy.

In my opinion, if a pool will need public financing, a much less-expensive pool option with a type of recreation district that provides taxpayer accountability would serve the needs of the valley far better than what is being proposed. About seven years ago, Tonasket funded an outdoor pool at a cost of about 13 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. Replacing the Wagner Memorial Pool with another pool on the same location seems like a logical alternative that needs consideration.

Dave Hopkins
Twisp

Paul Sisson
Winthrop

Not equitable

Dear Editor:

I support a pool for the Methow Valley. However, I do not support a year -round indoor aquatics center. It is stated in the My Turn column of June 28, that "we are community members just trying to find the most equitable way to support a pool long term." What is equitable about a bill that levies taxes on property owners only?

It has been said we are taxed on other necessary services. These services are listed on your tax bill. Here is a tax that is worthwhile and lifesaving. The Okanogan Conservation District tax is for towns and individuals wanting to have wildfire risk assessment on their property. Last week's paper mentioned that Twisp did not choose to join the district, but the DNR offers an alternative for those wanting an assessment.

The paper also said that property assessments were up by 30%. That doesn't always mean a tax increase but the current real estate market is still "hot." Comparable sale prices have not gone down. This could further add to our taxes. An Aquatics District tax would only add to the already high taxes.

The aquatics center started off with a \$20

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million estimate. The June 21 edition of the Methow Valley News states it is now in the vicinity of \$21 million. Net operating costs are estimated to be around \$500,000 yearly.

The feasibility study states, "Depending on the cost to build and operate the facility, the tax bases in Twisp and Okanogan County may not be adequate to sustainably fund services. Alternatively, funds could be adequate, and there

may be a need to 'right-size' the district to better align funding and usage of the facility among taxpayers."

Those on fixed incomes and lower-income property owners will be impacted the most. Is anyone thinking of them?

This proposal will most surely be on the November ballot. But I will vote no. There are other pressing needs in the valley. Just because there is no taxing district doesn't mean there can't be a pool.

Pearl Cherrington
Twisp