

# City sewer fees...again

## *It's a tax!*

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### Guest column

Today's News-Herald printed a Guest Column on June 21, 2013 authored by city manager Charlie Cassens, "*Lake Havasu City sewer charges discussed.*" In that piece, Cassens referenced material from a series of three lightly attended public forums late October 2013 and a city council meeting on February 19, 2013 on sewer fees. The TNH covered those meetings and you can also find the details in the council minutes on the city website.

Five options were presented by Cassens to reduce sewer rates. And, in my opinion, Cassens never says anything in a council meeting or a city press release (or his June 21 piece) without the explicit approval of mayor Mark Nexsen. So, all this stuff is official and with authority.

I published six columns in April on sewer issues and you can find them on my website, [www.billullery.com](http://www.billullery.com) under the REPORTS tab.

### Do nothing

What Cassens failed to mention in his June 21 piece was that the city settled on options #1 and #5, which was "*do nothing*" and "*refinance some of the debt.*" However, the refinancing option will have little impact on reducing sewer fees. In short, Cassens and the council opted to "*kick the can down the road.*" And...**do nothing!**

In his June 21 piece, Cassens also failed to mention that in his February 19 council presentation, "... *in the future, to keep the fund healthy, the City will need to implement a sewer rate increase in the three percent range.*" Moreover, Cassens called the rate increase a "*fee.*" He sidestepped the term "*tax*" even though you can't avoid the charges if you are connected to the sewer system.

If it were up to elected officials particularly in Havasu, few city charges would ever be called a "*tax.*" But, that's a problem with me because loose definitions deprive taxpayers of an understanding and a true meaning and cost of what's being done to them.

### It's a scam

It's a scam of sorts due in part to voter resistance to taxes. And, it's deeply rooted in our nation's history. But, since I'm paying for this space (I buy ink by the gallon), I hereby declare that Cassens and our "*do nothing council*" are trying to quietly raise sewer revenues while avoiding the "*tax hiker*" label even if it requires calling an obvious sewer tax a "*fee.*"

These shell games undermine transparency by making it harder for citizens to understand the true cost of government. Folks, you will see sometime in the near future, a sewer tax hike (oops...fee) as Cassens stated, "...*in the range of 3%.*" Check for yourself, the minutes of that February 19 council meeting.

Well...just watch the "*stuff*" hit the fan (pun intended) when Cassens and mayor Nexsen pull that off!

Which won't happen until after the November 2, 2014 when Nexsen, Callahan, and other council members run for re-election.

**Ask the residents**

Hmm... Do nothing? Keep the sewer rate structure the same? In the future, **increase the sewer tax (fee) 3%**?

Why not ask the residents what they think? I did! I did that in a scientific survey done in April of a core group of 6,000 Havasu voters. And, by an overwhelming majority, 91% of the surveyed Havasu voters agreed that changes must be made to reduce current sewer fees.

Moreover, 73% would vote for a "sewer flat-rate" not tied to water usage. 70% preferred multiple methods of fees and taxes to reduce monthly sewer fees. 67% wanted everyone including those not hooked up to the system, to share the burden of paying for the sewer project.

**Disconnect**

They all do it... When politicians run for election, you always get the same story. "*I'm a leader.*" "*I can make the tough decisions.*" "*I'll listen to the voters.*"

OK...I get it...with the sewer tax (fee) issue, there are no easy or good options. **None!**

The voters already did the heavy lifting. They voted in 2002 in record numbers and overwhelmingly passed in a landslide, the sewer project referendum; \$463 million and authorized an ad valorem tax.

What a pickle...poison pills, bad medicine, and pain. No easy or good options! But, who ever said being an elected official was a cake-walk? Heck...try being a voter in this town!

So, what's my advice, to our city officials? **Listen to the voters. Do your job. Fix the problem!**