

Fact Check #12

What do the tax payers want?

By Dr Bill Ullery

Why not ask them?

Last spring I initiated a series of surveys to help me focus my contributions (work and investments) in the areas of economic development and government policy at the local level. I picked a Phoenix polling firm that used a 6,000 Lake Havasu City voter demographic because it produces highly reliable data in predicting elections, measuring civic issues, and tracking public opinions.

I chose polling methodologies based on the science of [inferential statistics](#). A few years ago, as a researcher at the [University of Illinois](#) and as a Senior Research Scientist with the [American Institutes for Research](#) in Harvard Square, Cambridge, I gained considerable experience in these methods. For my Havasu projects, my goal was a 3% +- error rate on the items being measured. I started with the sewer project as it was the largest municipal bond vote in the history of Arizona. For a small town, it was and still is a big deal.

Sewer fee options are still not resolved

By an overwhelming majority, 91% of my surveyed Havasu voters agreed that changes must be made to the current sewer fee system. I found that to be an amazing level of response considering most opinion polls see splits in the range of 51-49%. A 60-40 split would be a land slide. 91% is huge on any civic or public opinion issue.

Moreover, 73% of our respondents voted for a “sewer flat-rate” not tied to water usage. 70% voted for 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. Clearly for any town, such high levels of agreement on any issue are unusual.

The initial fee system has not worked and citizens are irritated as shown in Bob N's letter to the editor; *“This apparent counter-productive system is regressive, punishing rather than encouraging good stewardship of our resources. This fee structure most certainly is also punitive and a cash cow for the city. You have a leak and the city gets a raise.”*

And, another wrote; *“This is crazy...the hottest city in the country in the middle of the desert and the mayor wants to keep sewer rates tied to water usage?”*

What's the problem? According to [Fitch Ratings](#), Havasu has a sewer fee and a debt burden nearly double that of a normal town. That's a problem. But, sewer rates tied to water usage is the bigger problem because it's hated by nearly everyone.

Why does our city ignore the will of the people?

Dennis W said in an email, “*It’s about political agendas related to re-election strategies. Or simply arrogance, abuse of power, and control of a multi-million dollar city government.*”

Moreover, in any community with an entrenched political [oligarchy](#) based on [patronage](#), you get a corrupted government where power rests with a small clique of the friends and relatives of the leader. Such structures are always detrimental to progress, prosperity, and good government.

In the coming months, I’ll try to address other major issues with city government. But presently, I need help with a “*stop the sewer fee tied to water usage*” project. Visit our Swap Meet booth (row G #22, center area), sign a petition, and join our group.

To volunteer, please contact me: Email dbu@dbuhomes.com Web www.BillUllery.com Cell 928-716-3014.