

Seeking Honest Governance In Whitefish MT

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At a recent Whitefish City Council meeting on Sept 20, I submitted a Summary of a report that showed that Whitefish was overcharging impact fees to its residents and builders. The report stated an obvious fact that water and sewer impact fees more than tripled after the Council approved major impact fee increases. The water and sewer fees collected went from \$488K to \$1.66M and we found these numbers in the most recent City budget documents. But Councilman Andy Feury was so upset by this statement that he went so far as to call us liars “If figures don’t lie, liars don’t figure”. Contrary to the city’s own documents and prior statements by the City Manager and Director of Planning, Feury claimed that increased building permits were responsible for this increase.

Let’s look closely at what the Council approved back in 2018 and 2019 and why these numbers increased so dramatically. Water and sewer impact fees were \$3295 before the City and Mr. Feury voted to increase them. After the vote, the average homeowner was paying \$8568 according to City Manager Dana Smith in a Whitefish Pilot article. These numbers are all supported in our report and come from extensive research through City documents and news articles.

Now add the overcharges that the City admitted at the Council meeting, and these fees are even higher, approaching a 3 fold increase. Yes, economic activity accounts for some of the increase, but nowhere near what Mr. Feury wants us to believe.

This is nothing but a distraction from the results of our study. A City contractor (FCS) produced an impact fee update that recommended the City could only legally increase its water and sewer impact fees by 31% to \$4300. The City however, by padding costs and manipulating planning documents, raised these fees to over \$6000. Then the City used a 20 year old collection chart that was incompatible with the FCS update to raise these fees again to well over \$8000.

Having someone in Whitefish politics calling us liars is disturbing, especially when all the facts are on our side. We don’t expect to hear an apology from Mr. Feury either but feel that his performance should not go unchallenged.

Using our report, we requested that the City of Whitefish contract an INDEPENDENT audit of the irregularities we identified, but the City voted this down at this Council meeting. Because our report identifies potentially \$millions in overcharges, we fully expected the City to attempt to discredit our research. City Manager Smith said she is using the City’s paid contractor (FCS) to review the report, but they are certainly not an independent auditor.

My partner in this report (Bill Burg) and I are numbers guys. Bill is a CPA, and my background is Computer Science. I have run my own computer company for over 40 years. Both of us are former military officers. Bill was a naval aviator, and I am a graduate of the Air Force Academy and was a data analyst. Neither of us will benefit financially from our research. We are simply seeking honest governance.

Paul Gillman
Whitefish MT

