

CARROLL COUNTY COMET

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Capital Comments

Band-aid or surgery for Indiana property taxes?

**By Larry DeBoer
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Each year brings a new property tax crisis. The General Assembly scrambles to defend homeowners from big tax hikes. Each year, legislators are accused of merely postponing the problem with a policy "Band-aid." When will Indiana's system of local finance get the diagnosis and treatment it needs? When should we schedule the surgery?

The legislature faced another property tax crisis in 2007. Average homeowner tax bills are rising an estimated 24 percent statewide. Legislators stuck a two-year Band-aid on the problem. But, this time, maybe they've scheduled the surgery.

Homeowner taxes are expected to increase because of policy changes made in past years. Property taxes on inventories will be eliminated for taxes this year in 51 counties. These payments will shift to other taxpayers, including homeowners. The state has capped its payments for property tax relief at just over \$2 billion. Without added tax credits, homeowners pay a bigger share of rising tax levies.

The policy change with the biggest effect, though, is trending. We're updating assessed values each year to keep up with changing sales prices. Unfortunately, assessments this time are being updated from 1999 selling prices to 2005 selling prices. That's six years of accumulated price changes, all at once. The results so far show that in many counties home assessments are being trended upward a lot more than business assessments. This shifts taxes toward homeowners.

The 2007 General Assembly stuck a Band-aid on this problem. We're going to use the up-front payments from the two new "racinos" - the horse tracks that are installing slot machines - to reduce the homeowner property tax hike in 2007 and 2008. That's \$550 million in new property tax relief over two years. That should reduce the average homeowner tax bill hike to about 8 percent in 2007 and 2008.

This year, homeowners will receive a "Christmas bonus" in November or December, rebating part of their tax bills. In 2008, the tax relief will be applied directly to tax bills. The year-end rebate may be a polit-

ical move to remind taxpayers that the General Assembly is delivering tax relief. But there's a practical reason for the rebates, too. The state won't have the money until then. The racino payments won't arrive until later this year.

That's the Band-aid. What about scheduling surgery? We may have a tentative date with the operating table: Aug. 1, 2009.

The General Assembly offered local governments some new income tax options for property tax relief. The big one is an income tax of up to 1 percent to be used dollar-for-dollar to reduce property taxes. A county can distribute the money in three ways. It can reduce property taxes for all property owners, for homeowners only, or for homeowners and rental-housing owners. Counties have until Aug. 1 each year to adopt.

In the average county, a 1 percent income tax would reduce property taxes for all taxpayers by about 20 percent. Most farmers, retired homeowners and corporate businesses would pay less overall. Renters would pay more. Most employed homeowners would see their income taxes rise more than their property taxes would fall.

If the tax relief goes to homeowners alone, though, the impact is different. Homeowner property taxes would be cut in half in the average county, and almost all homeowners would see their combined property and income tax payments drop. Other property owners who earn income in the county would pay more. If the tax relief goes to homeowners and landlords, homeowner property taxes would drop by a third, and most would see an overall tax cut.

Come 2009, the racino money runs out and the Band-aid comes off. It's likely that homeowner taxes will jump again. What will the General Assembly do? Perhaps it will find money for more state credits. Or, perhaps legislators will say to local governments, "It's your problem, now."

The new income tax options give counties the ability to enact major property tax cuts. If the state legislature backs off in 2009, taxpayers may pressure counties to act. That's our date with surgery: The mix of taxes that we use to pay for Indiana local government could change—a lot.

For the summer this year we've got a little humble abode down near the lake to use. Out the front door and just past the crowded, noisy parking lot lies a beautiful sandy beach - and, get this, a hot dog stand. What a deal!

We had some family and guests over to visit on Memorial Day. The place is not furnished - not a stick yet. That remains our job. So that afternoon we wound up in a ragged circle in front of the living room picture window sitting on patio furniture leftover from a former owner. A few folding beach chairs we picked up on sale at the garden center finished out the seating arrangement.

I'm usually the one to detect a "smell" that needs identifying. But that wasn't the case this time around.

"Do you smell something?" my wife asked.
"Yes, what is that," replied an in-law to the right."

And we were off and running.

Me and those on my side of the circle smelled nothing, but those on my wife's side of the circle all detected the odor.

I opened a window. Then, thinking the smell was coming from the outside, someone else closed the window.

I turned on the air conditioning.

Then I went around smelling air ducts.

Midwest Memo

by Alan Shultz



What's that smell?

The ancient stove in the kitchen with lurking pilot lights was suspect. We gave it the once over.

On to the hot water heater we headed. Noses were pointed into the air.

The smell grew in intensity. The smell kept getting worse. It hung in the air like the diesel fuel that hovers over the water after a boat has idled. We looked accusingly at the boats bobbing on the lake a block away. Outside again I went. This time I circled around a dump truck parked on the parking lot next door - sniffing and sniffing for the source of the smell.

The smell was making folks uneasy. I was not the only one getting a headache.

Finally, the guests made a quick exit for other activities, figuring it wasn't a great idea to sit and inhale whatever it was building in the air inside.

We invited our neighbors in for a fresh opinion. No, they didn't have that smell in their place but, yes, it smelled like diesel fuel in ours. The smell was decidedly limited to the

living room. It wasn't outside; it wasn't in any of the other rooms.

"What's in the crawl space?" I forget who posed that question.

All kinds of unpleasant possibilities came to mind.

I put on grubby clothes and pulled the hatch open to go exploring. A flashlight was located after much commotion. Visions of an old fuel tank and a visit from the EPA came to me as I lowered myself into uncharted territory. For a moment I saw crime scene tape wrapped around the property, then a condemned sign appeared in my vision. I lowered myself into the cobwebs and musty dark air that is uniquely crawl space territory.

My wife interrupted my racing imagination with what they describe in the courtroom as an excited utterance. "I've got it," she exclaimed!

It was the bargain, \$3.98 a piece, vinyl beach chairs that were fouling the air with an incredible diesel fuel smell. You could actually "taste" the smell in the air. The process is called "off-gassing" and petroleum based products often undergo this unpleasant phenomenon.

Out the back door went the chairs, open went the windows, and we headed to the beach in the direction of a much more pleasant smell - that of hot dogs.

Letters to the Editor

The Comet welcomes letters to the editor responding to articles and events in the news. They must include the author's name, address and telephone number. The letter writer's name and city/town will appear in the paper - no exceptions. Letters must be 400 words or less in length. Please send your letters to editor@carrollcountycomet.com; Letters to the Editor, Comet, P.O. Box 26, Flora, IN 46929 or P.O. Box 179, Delphi, IN 46923; or fax 574-967-3384 or 765-564-2010. By submitting a letter or opinion article, the author grants the Comet the right to publish, distribute, archive or use the work in print, electronic, on-line or other format.

Building needed to preserve county's history

With the Canal Interpretive Center, Carroll County has a supreme tourist attraction and a wonderful educational resource, but very few county citizens are aware of another equally valuable attraction and resource; the Carroll County Historical Museum. The massive amount of historical relics on display doesn't compare to the massive amount of historical relics in storage. Unfortunately, there is no available space for them to be displayed and no funding available to make it happen.

Phyllis Moore, curator of the Carroll County Historical Museum, has dedicated her life's work to the preservation of the "human-side" of Carroll County. She has "rallied the troops" on more than one occasion in order to preserve something that is about to be destroyed and lost forever. She has learned and taught the stories of the families that created Carroll County, built Carroll County, and embraced Carroll County, in the past, today, and tomorrow. Phyllis Moore has also developed a genealogy library that rivals that of larger libraries and museums across the state and country. We have a resource that needs to be respected and needs to be cherished for future generations.

A Carroll County Historical Museum and Genealogy Library is available to the citizens of Carroll County, but it needs a building and it needs funding. Someone, somewhere, knows how to make this happen. PLEASE, step forward and offer your assistance, knowledge, know-how, and resources.

What a shame that the old Delphi High School building couldn't have been preserved for just such a purpose. There is another such building available NOW, which could extend the "History Seeking Tourist" to other parts of the county. Need I say more?

Candy Spence
Delphi

Citizens against sewer district to meet

There will be a meeting in this area that concerns all of us. If you live in Carroll County and especially Jefferson Township you should make it a point to attend this meeting on Thursday, May 31, at 7 p.m. at the Yeoman United Methodist Church on US421!

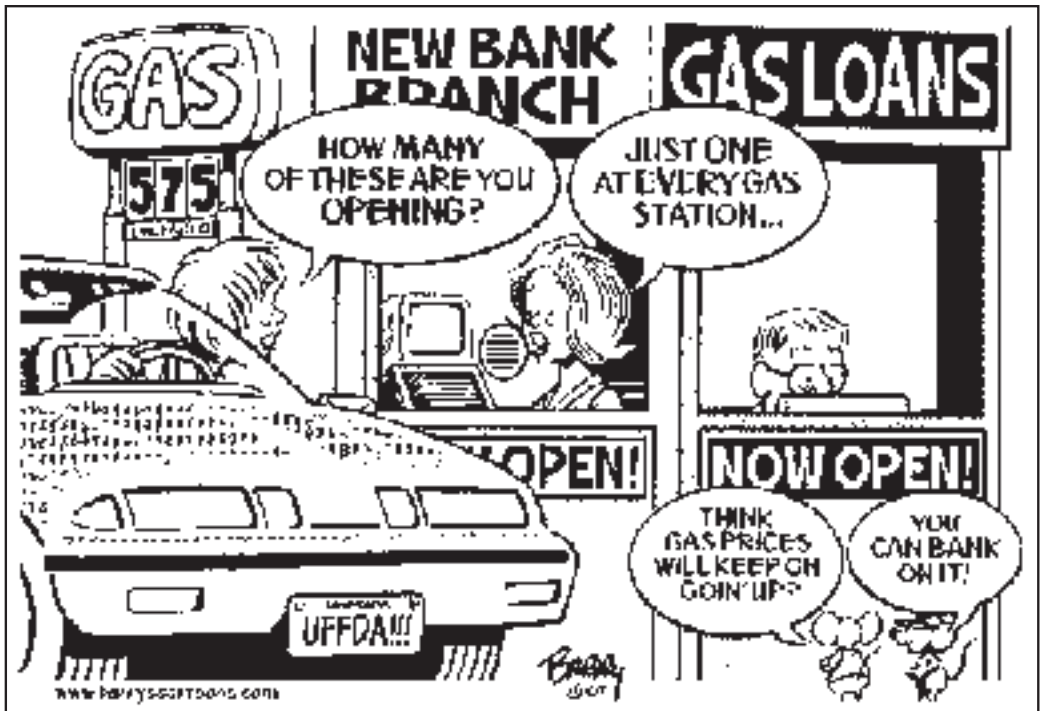
The meeting will address the concerns of the citizens of Jefferson Township who are affected by the former commissioners' decision to include their property in the Twin Lakes Regional Sewer District (TLRSD) and those who may be adversely affected at a later date. We will report our efforts thus far and present to you what we feel is important for the future of our township.

We will be addressing all property owners in Jefferson Township because it will affect you in one way or another. We feel the citizens should have a say in their destiny - and I do urge you to attend.

TLRSD board members, Anderson and Garrison have both told me there are LESS THAN 100 homeowners in Jefferson Township who DO NOT WANT the Twin Lakes Regional Sewer District in this township. NOW is the time to stand up and be counted.

Plan to attend Thursday night. I look forward to seeing you there.

Pat Robertson
Jefferson Township resident



Superior Court Judge Jeffrey Smith

Superior Court judgments are gathered from public records on file in the Carroll County Clerk's office on the second floor of the courthouse, Delphi.

Anne E. Douglas, 30, of Delphi, pled guilty to neglect of a dependent and criminal mischief. She was sentenced to one year in jail, all suspended, and one year supervised probation.

Dustin J. Gangwer, 17, of Cutler, pled guilty to theft and carrying a handgun without a license. He was sentenced to one and a half years in jail, all suspended, and one and a half years supervised probation.

For convictions related to alcohol, the following were meted a combination of jail time, with some suspensions, probation with fees, community service, house arrest, participation in a court-approved drug and alcohol program, and suspended and/or probationary driving privileges: Katrina Courtney, 28, public intoxication and disorderly conduct; Tyler P. Bitner, 18, of Frankfort, illegal consumption of an alcoholic beverage; Thomas L. Marchand, 47, of Delphi, public intoxication; Holly M. Bloomquist, 19, of Frankfort, illegal consumption of an alcoholic beverage; Carey L. Yard, 35, of Monticello, operating while intoxicated; Janelle D. Morgan, 19, of Mulberry, illegal consumption of an alcoholic beverage; Brian M. Evans, 45, of Camden, operating while intoxicated - endangering a person; Gary J. Austin, 37, of Monticello, public intoxication; Kenneth G. Couch, 53, of Delphi, public intoxication; David A. Goff Jr., 27, of Berne, operating a vehicle with ACE of .08 or more - prior; Kenneth G. Couch, operating a vehicle while intoxicated - endangering a person; Gregory S. French, 41, of Camden, operating a vehicle while intoxicated; Bradford A. Myers, 57, of Delphi, operating a vehicle while intoxicated - prior; and Kenneth Willis, 23, of Delphi, operating while intoxicated - endangering a person.

Chris Savoldi, 21, of Flora, pled guilty to four counts of check deception. As the defendant was already serving a sentence out of circuit court, the court did not order any executed time.

Brian S. Smith, 43, of Delphi, pled guilty to driving while suspended. He was sentenced to 180 days in jail, all suspended, and

one year supervised probation.

Matthew T. Skeens, 22, of Casper, Wyo., pled guilty to auto theft, operating while intoxicated and failure to stop after accident resulting in non-vehicle damage. He was sentenced to four years in prison, all but one year suspended, and three years supervised probation.

Because the public has a right to know...

In an effort to help our readers understand what government meetings are happening when and where, the Comet will now print upcoming meetings on a weekly basis.

- Wednesday, May 30
 - √Carroll School Board special meeting: 7:30 p.m., Elementary school administration office
- Thursday, May 31
 - √Carroll County Council (joint meeting with commissioners and department heads): 8 a.m.
- Monday, June 4
 - √Drainage Board: 8:30 a.m.
 - √Commissioners: 9 a.m.
 - √Flora Town Council: 6 p.m., Fireside Building
 - √Delphi Board of Works: 6:30 p.m.
 - √Delphi City Council: 7 p.m., city hall
 - √Burlington Town Council: 7 p.m., town hall
- Tuesday, June 5
 - √Camden Town Council: 7 p.m., Community Building
 - √Carroll School Board: 7:30 p.m., administration office
- Thursday, June 7
 - √County Council special meeting-budget review: 8:30 a.m.

Public Notices appearing in this issue of the Comet:

- Co Ordinance# 2007-033B
- Sheriff Sale-Denton.....3B
- Sheriff Sale-Richeson.....3B
- Sheriff Sale-Butcher3B
- Sheriff SaleDillon3B
- Notice of Suit-Conde3B
- O'Donnell Estate3B
- NWISWD-Budget.....4B
- County Claims3B
- Highway Claims3B
- Wagoner Estate4B
- RCSD Aftercare4B
- Notice-Cade4B

Questions concerning Indiana's Open Door and Public Access Laws may be directed to the state's public access office, at 1-800-228-6013.

Circuit Court Judge Donald Currie

New filings are from public records available in the Carroll County Clerk's office on the second floor of the courthouse, Delphi. Other information regarding judgments and marriage dissolutions is gathered from public records found in the clerk's office.

A bond reduction was ordered for Jarrett A. Embrey.

The court denied a motion by Brian W. Pancake for modification or reduction of his sentence.

A decree of dissolution was granted between the following: Vanessa Harter and Shawn Harter; Jeremy Scott Everett and Christina Marie Everett; Alfonso Zarate and Rosy Aimee Quintana; William J. Burroughs and Marsha Rae Burroughs, whose maiden name was restored; Ed Bell and Janice Bell; Kristina A. Brickhouse and Daniel D. Brickhouse; Shain Dale Sivils and Janet Louise Sivils, whose maiden name of Janet Louise Burns was restored; Cynthia J. Smith, whose maiden name of Cynthia J. Lucas, and Royce A. Smith; amd Cassandra Kyc and Pawel Kyc.

FCI National Fund II LLC filed a complaint on note and to foreclose mortgage against Carl E. Yeagley and Doris Ann Yeagley.

First Financial Bank filed a complaint on account against Larry L. Shives and Sharon L. Shives.

Wells Fargo Bank NA filed a complaint to foreclose mortgage against Timothy P. Cade and Della L. Cade.

Midland Credit Management filed a complaint against Donna Coup.

First Horizon Home Loan Corp. filed a complaint on note and to foreclose mortgage against Jimmy D. Northern and Delia M. Northern.

Midland Funding Management Inc. filed a complaint against Kenneth J. Slaybaugh.

Bank of America filed a complaint against Sergio A. Hernandez.

Web poll

Tell us starting Wednesday at our web site, carrollcountycomet.com

Each week the Comet polls its readers on a different topic. Vote online at carrollcountycomet.com starting each Thursday, and then click the Comments link to send us an email voicing your opinion. The best responses will be printed the following week.

Do you believe that county government would run more efficiently and economically with the hiring of a county manager?

Yes
No
Undecided

Last Weeks results

What do you think is the most important pearl of wisdom to offer graduates?

- 32% Remain true to your faith, all else will fall in place
- 35% How you treat others, no matter their station in life, speaks of your character
- 2% Do something good for your community or someone in it every week
- 31% If you don't enjoy your job, find something that you do enjoy and make that your life's work

Total responses: 62
Reader's comments: