OPINION

Trust a factor in failed sales tax

It's a matter of trust.

In the autopsy over the failed Nov. 3 Valley Center sales tax vote for the fire department, it's important for the City of Valley Center to have some introspection.

We've heard from voter after voter who couldn't support the sales tax because they didn't trust the city with another source of revenue.

They had reasons.

Some pointed to the recreation center sales tax that voters approved in 2020. Voters were asked to consider paying for a $10 million project. After the successful election, the project ballooned to $20 million. That didn't make sense.

We're not going to relitigate that issue today. It's been well dissected over the years. The fact is, it had a negative effect on the Nov. 3 vote all these years later.

Voters were rightly skeptical of the numbers.

Would a 1 percent sales tax be enough to grow the fire department into the future? Are the projections accurate? Will the city ask for more?

In addition, voters were left scratching their heads over the city's recent nearly $1 million blunder with the revenue-neutral property tax hearing.

The city's finance director set a hearing date on the 2027 budget for Sept. 1, but later changed it to Sept. 25. Not having the hearing on Sept. 1 wiped out all future city council action on the 2027 budget, reverting back to 2026 revenue levels.

The mistake led to the loss of more than $925,000 in property tax revenue the city projected to receive in 2027.

Voters have told us the mistake made them hesitant to give the city more money.

Yes, this is water under the bridge. Voters chose to shut down the city's fire department and merge with Sedgwick County. That bell has rung.

But it's important for community leaders to remember the impact their actions have on future decisions.

— The Ark Valley News



Council takes on loaded issue



Out of the office

By Chris Strunk

The Valley Center City Council took on a loaded issue last week.

The council began discussing regulations for AI data centers.

Kyle Fiedler, the city's community development director, said the city does not have any regulations on the books and it wanted to be proactive in case data centers begin poking around Valley Center.

"We do not have a data center coming to Valley Center," Fiedler told the city council on Nov. 17. "We've had no one contact us."

It's a big and often emotional issue right here and across the country.

On one hand, data centers can provide an economic boost to communities. On the other, they can be a drain on resources and have a negative impact on the environment.

The city's planning and zoning board will begin working on regulations, which could mean changes in zoning codes, but Fiedler wanted the council's input before that process started.

The city must decide whether to regulate data centers by size and whether to make such facilities go through a special-use permitting process with the city.

"I'm not sure how I feel about data centers," council member Chris Evans said. "So, I was wondering if there's some way we can we get more information about how data centers affect the area so we can make a good decision on how we write this ordinance."

Evans suggested the city look at what other municipalities have done.

Fiedler said several communities are looking at regulations.

"I'd like to see what Wichita and the county have put together," Mayor Jet Truman said. "… I'm confused about data centers. You hear the pros and the cons."

Council member Jeanne Daniels suggested the city look at the work done by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, which has been studying data centers across the country and offered sample zoning ordinances to deal with them.

Council member Matt Stamm said anyone with a cell phone has likely utilized a data center at some point.

"Just like cell towers back in the day," he said. "No one wanted a cell tower in their backyard but everyone wanted their cell phone to work. So, it's a give-and-take thing."

Council member Gina Gregory said data centers aren't going away.

"It's coming. It's part of our future. Thank you for helping us prepare," she said.

Truman acknowledged that regulating such facilities is a difficult task.

"I think the planning commission has their work cut out for them," he said.

Fiedler said the commission isn't rushing the process, which could include informal public forums to gather input as well as formal public hearings.

Chris Strunk is publisher of The Ark Valley News. Reach him at 755-0821 or news@arkvalleynews.com, or find him on Facebook.

He's on Thanksgiving No. 76



A likely story

By Roger Ryberg

If I tried to express gratitude for all I'm thankful for today, the green bean casserole would be finished before I was. The second would be my loving wife, who says grace more than I ever could, and third would be the turkey who started all this.

So I'll try to be brief. First and foremost, I'm most thankful for the God who brought me into this world in the first place. I could have gone down with the ship, which was actually a houseboat when it sank in 1950, or died from natural causes when I crashed a stolen car on the Crosstown Freeway.

That's how it works, ya know. Run from the cops, hit a bridge at a hundred miles an hour, and pass away. Naturally. But what did I know? I was 16 at the time, not thankful enough to know handcuffs would leave a wrist pain I can still feel in my dreams today.

But I am thankful today, 58 years later, that I had a no-nonsense parole officer who promised the next offense would be a prepaid bus ticket to prison. It was enough to point me towards the straight and narrow, which turned out to be filled with blind curves anyways.

I can't even imagine Thanksgiving without thinking of the woman who took a wrong turn and ended up across from me at Red Lobster in Conroe, Texas. We have a lot in common, including our Christian faith, dry humor, political covenant and Alaskan salmon. We've never argued in 12 years of marriage, which makes me think I must have made a promise. Or maybe a bet, anyway.

But she's also everything I'm not, including disciplined, smart, courteous, comforting, classy and patient. She's the only woman I've ever met who can give you what-for and forgiveness in the same breath. Partner, programmer, proofreader and caregiver, I can't imagine what she sees in me, but it's genuine, devoted, unconditional and complete.

Which brings me to these latest 10 years. There have been a few bumps in the road, including a small heart attack, minor bypass surgery, secondhand pacemaker, and now a newer-model hip replacement. But in every instance, there was a reason to express gratitude, or at least an 18 percent tip.

To start with, the fire department was on scene in four minutes, which is faster than I could show interest in a two-dollar auction. It's more time than I spent with the heart surgeon, for what that's worth, who knew at a glance that I was gonna be OK. He retired very shortly after, but I don't think it was because of me.

Somebody during that time forgot to suspend my DOT medical card, so I was able to resume trucking about two months early. That led to a five-year stint with 10 Roads Express, the first company I ever worked for to blow a billion dollars in less than a decade. But they paid good, and by the end of my tenure we had hundreds in the bank.

Many things we're thankful for aren't so obvious but deserve mention anyway. Just to have employment at our age — any employment at all — is a blessing. And to be acknowledged by friends at the coffee shop is no small gesture. Here in Hays County, after all, it costs $5.18!

Well, the turkey is cooked and so am I, but the green bean casserole is still hot, so excuse me while we salute another year without holiday traffic, late fees, bodies in the breezeway or political banners in the mailbox.

Roger Ryberg is a former Valley Center resident. After 40 years of interstate trucking, he's too old for a paper route, too young to retire and too tired to have an affair. You can reach him at rogerclark437@gmail.com.

What's on your mind?

Silence is loud

The fact that not a single one of our city council representatives or mayor had anything to say Nov. 17 when the new city manager asked them for comments about the sales tax vote that has now ended our 100-plus-year fire department is very telling and extremely disappointing. I want to say I'm surprised but I'm not because it's an unfortunate display of their character. We need leadership right now, not just people in positions of authority, and there is not a single person on our council or in city hall anymore that understands what it means to lead. They shouldn't have let the old city manager leave.

Close the pool

There should be no question about keeping the Lions Park pool open. It is and has been a money loser for many years. Close it down. The city loses money on most of the projects it gets involved in and says "Yes" to most projects that are not needed.

No BBB

They are saying on TV to report any scammers to the Better Business Bureau, but I found out not long ago that there was not one in Wichita anymore. I called the county for their address, and the county acted surprised that it was not in Wichita any longer. Were they funded by the county? I needed to report something to them and I was told to use the one in Overland Park. Too far for what I needed.

Views from News readers

Letter to the editor

Senior squeeze

Valley Center retirees on fixed incomes are facing a financial squeeze from both Washington and Topeka. And it is time for every senior in our community to speak up before the 2027 Kansas legislative session begins in January.

In Washington, Social Security benefits are still taxed using outdated income thresholds set in 1983 ($25,000 individual/$32,000 married) and 1993 ($34,000/$44,000). Because Congress has never indexed those limits for inflation, annual cost-of-living adjustments push more of our earned benefits into taxable income while groceries, utilities, insurance and health care keep climbing.

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What's on your mind?

Write a letter and drop it off at 210 W. Main, Valley Center, or email comments to news@arkvalleynews.com

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