

A “secret vote” to raise taxes. This is the plan? Really?

The Budget Committee “Read-out” for the 11/7 Sebastopol City Council meeting was mind numbing in its detail, but I appreciate full disclosure. I dutifully read the several pages about the election laws over the weekend explaining that a new tax measure required a unanimous Council vote for an emergency and 4/5 vote to place a new tax measure on the ballot in March.

It is hard to make the case for an emergency given our General Fund is well within policy guidelines well into 2025 and the budget numbers are highly uncertain. There are not council 4 votes for a ballot initiative in March that would compete with the tax proposed for the County Fire Services. My conclusion was finally we can move on to many priorities that are being neglected.

Late tonight, less than 24 hours before the Council Meeting, I receive news that the Budget Committee document has a “typo”. In fact, Council without an emergency declaration can with only three votes put a special tax on the ballot. This is in fact the secret plan for the November 7 meeting.

This didn’t come up during the long discussions of this item at prior meetings. It wasn’t in the staff report for this meeting, but it turns out it is going to be discussed at the meeting starting in 18 hours?

What happened to 72 hour disclosure laws? Is it legal to put out pages of documents that say nothing about an easy path to raise a special tax and then declare we were informed, it was just a typo?

The Sebastopol City Council has a long history of making decisions on unpopular items after taking steps to discourage public awareness. Controversial items have in the past been put at the end of the agenda ensuring they would not be discussed until late in the night. Almost as often, items have been deferred to a special meeting that only those that follow government closely would know had been scheduled.

This time it looks like the critical information was obscured by mind numbing details in the Report-out and a “typo” to cover up the true intent of the agenda discussion for November 7.

This is starting to look like a “secret vote” to raise our taxes. This is the plan? Really?