

GMAR
Greater Milwaukee Association of
REALTORS®

January 26, 2006

Alderman Michael D'Amato, Chairman
City of Milwaukee Judiciary & Legislation
City Hall, Room 205
200 East Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202-3570

RE: Public Services Financing Referendum (File #051299)

Dear Alderman D'Amato:

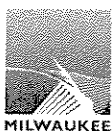
On behalf of the Greater Milwaukee Association of REALTORS®, I would like to comment on the proposed referendum requesting voter permission to find new ways to finance basic city services.

I applaud the city's effort to creatively engage the citizens in the City of Milwaukee in a discussion about public finances. I would question, however, the relative cost and accuracy of the proposed referendum.

While the cost of the referendum may be rolled into the overall cost of the spring election, it probably would not be as cost effective as conducting a public opinion survey. The results of a referendum are representative of those who vote in a particular election and may be influenced by those motivated either for or against a particular issue. Of course, that is the democratic process, but it would not yield necessarily accurate, scientifically defensible data that will help the city as it crafts its budget or petition the legislature for other revenue sources.

I understand the wording of the referendum has not been finalized, however I would argue that the version in file #051299 leads voters to answer, yes. It doesn't really present a choice for voters to make, rather it asks for their uninformed opinion. The first thought I had when reading the referendum question – trying to read from a citizen's perspective – was, What does the city spend all of its money on that has led to a reduction in basic city services?

Additionally, in asking for new ways to pay for city services, the reader would have to question what "new ways" is the city thinking of to raise revenue for basic services. And, whether they would ultimately cause their aggregate tax bill to go up. Also, would there be a corresponding decrease in the tax levy for each dollar of new revenue that comes in, so that aggregate taxes do not increase.



12300 W. Center St. ■ Milwaukee, WI 53222
Phone 414.778.4929 ■ Toll Free 866.303.GMAR ■ Fax 414.778.4920
www.gmar.ws

If a referendum is the form of accumulating citizen input the Common Council chooses, I would suggest submitting several questions to voters. For example, a question dealing with reduced fire protection could be crafted that gives voters a choice as to whether the city should go from 5 to 4 firefighters per truck.

The use of a referendum to gain public support is not as straightforward as it may at first appear to be, and would be subject to a wide array of opinions as to what the voters "actually meant" when the results are tallied. I would suggest the city examine a more scientifically proved method for gathering information that would be useful to policymakers.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you would like to discuss this matter with me, please feel free to contact me at 414-778-4929 or mr@gmar.ws.

Sincerely,



Mike Ruzicka
President