

Brian J. Sullivan Op-Ed Piece submitted to News-Gazette

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Here we go again, another new “tax”, deceptively called “Stormwater Utility fee” slated to be voted on in early 2012 by the City Council. This new “tax” will be charged against all properties based on the amount of impervious area on each homeowner’s property such as, roofs, parking lots, streets, sidewalks and driveways! This includes private residences, commercial and non-profits. Fees for an average homeowner (Tier 2) would be \$10.55 per month or \$126.60 per year, while large apartment buildings, box stores and malls could be paying in the thousands of dollars.

While I commend the city for its great moniker calling it a “fee” (for legal reasons), it’s still a “tax”; an additional cost to you! Not only will you be paying this “tax” on your home, but also a second time every time you shop, purchase gas, go to the movies as businesses incorporate this “tax” by raising prices.

While it may seem benign, it will further erode our already fragile economy still in the worst economic recession since the great depression.

Please note that this “tax” is in addition to the \$5,100,000 already collected by the city from property and sales tax and used for stormwater infrastructure, maintenance, rehabilitation and improvement, plus stormwater quality improvements.

As a business owner, a homeowner, multi-property owner and consumer in Champaign, I can tell you first hand the effects of such a “tax” will have on my business. First, let me make clear that this is not the first new “tax” we’ve had. As a multi-property owner we have experienced a myriad of new “taxes” in the last couple of years. (Inspection fees, recycling fees, fire safety fees) are several most recent, not to mention new code compliance expenses. This in addition to higher power bills, insurance, property taxes, doubling of our water rates and ending the year with the highest gasoline prices in history. All

these additional “taxes” add up. Over the last couple of years my operating expenses has nearly doubled while my income has fallen. I have tried to absorb the bulk of most of these “taxes” . However, one cannot run a successful business in the red and from time to time these increases are passed onto my tenants in the form of higher rents. And guess what, they cannot afford the increases either and subsequently have moved out, leaving me with over 70% vacancy rates. (of the likes I have never seen in over 30 years in the multi-family rental business). This is serious, this is real. I know people in this community who have lost their jobs, who have declared bankruptcy, who have lost their home and life savings (one person is living out of their car).

No one can debate the validity, the need for, or dispute the engineering/consultants studies that we need to continue to improve our city’s infrastructure, but take a look around you. There are empty store fronts up and down most major streets, established businesses are closing their doors and there are thousands of unsold homes are on the market. Gas prices are at a record high. And thousands are still out of work, and those that are still working have not seen an increase in their wages for several years and in fact have been asked to contribute more to their health care, thereby decreasing their earning power even more.

We can all agree that there are many needs in the city’s budget. However, I believe the public deserves prudence and judicious use of our tax dollars. When times are tough (as they are now) then some belt tightening is in order. Families are sacrificing, and so should the city, lest we forget that tax payers are real people in this community. They have no more to give and this planned “tax” will hurt the lower and middle class the most. We talk about affordable housing, yet our policies do everything possible to tax people out of their homes.

I say enough is enough! While the intent of the “tax” is noble, in this economic climate it is not appropriate. I urge the City Council members to reconsider their support for the passage of the

“Stormwater Utility Fee” and to consider the extra tax burden it will place on all citizens of Champaign, especially those least able to afford it, if it is passed. I also urge all citizens of Champaign to contact their council members and to express their disapproval of this new “tax”.