

November 27, 2023

Eleazer Akuchi
Mansfield City Council
Sent via email: eakuchie@ci.mansfield.oh.us

Dear Rev L,

Thank you for explaining to me in writing why you, and presumably 5 other members of council, voted against giving us another chance to start replacing bad water mains. Your email states "you have enough time to get required signatures to put it back on the ballot..... I hope you will take immediate action to secure the necessary signatures to get it back on the ballot". Perhaps Council did not pause to calculate that we would need a minimum of 250 hours of high-skill volunteer time from people motivated to work in winter weather to get this on the ballot by the 12-20-23 deadline. (See the breakdown of the minimum 250 hours below**)

Please ask Council to weigh what you ask of us against the time it would take City Council to put this back on the ballot. The legislation necessary to put it on the ballot had already been prepared for you. You could have, and you still could, put it back on the ballot in a few minutes. If you take those few minutes, we still have the work of persuading a few hundred voters to change their mind from 'no' to 'yes'. Contrast your few minutes with our city's track record for replacing water mains that were deemed too small since the 1920's & 30's when they were installed:

* 2 & ½ miles of water mains replaced in the last 20 years, none in the last 8 years.

* No water main replacement funds are in the budget for 2024 or 2025, so your no vote guarantees 10 (ten!) straight years of failure to invest.

* 60 miles of water mains are overdue for replacement today.

Our committee naively believed Council would either put us back on the ballot since we almost succeeded, or that you would respect our efforts enough to at least allow some debate in a committee meeting before voting against us. Who else do you have, other than our committee, to persuade the voters that a temporary tax is needed to replace our aging water mains? How is it that your respect for the 'no' voters exceeds your concern for providing fire safety for the whole community? Taking a few minutes of your time to then hand the job of persuading a majority to protect its infrastructure seemed like such a small request of you, that we had no idea you would erect a roadblock to impair our effort by telling us to go circulate a petition on short notice.¹

Eric S. Miller, Treasurer
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So now, let's look at a realistic time frame to ask voters to pass this temporary tax in the future :

1. Not in November of 2024, a presidential election is a bigger distraction than the abortion amendment.
2. Not in 2025, because we do not want to compete with the pride tax which is needed to sustain safety forces.
3. Sometime in 2026 or 2027 looks like your best shot to me.

I hope that by then you can have a bigger, better citizens group to pass such a tax initiative. Certainly, the problem will be worse by then. By then, more jobs will be lost for lack of reliable water. The urgency will

¹ BARRIERS TO A SUCCESSFUL PETITION BY 12-20-23 City Council Members take an oath of office, and thus you feel obliged to listen to us. The citizens whose signatures we must seek do not feel constrained by such an oath. As we go from house to house to ask for their signatures, they don't have to answer the door, they don't have to listen to us at all, let alone hear a detailed description of hidden infrastructure that serves their daily needs, but could fail when there is a fire. For our group, it would take at least 250 hours by motivated volunteers to get the necessary signatures. So, you are asking us to put in this time on cold December days when it gets dark by 6 p.m. in order to duplicate a task that you could complete in a few minutes. Is that a fair ask of us on your part? Now, just in case you think that I overestimate the hours involved in this process, I'll break it down for you.

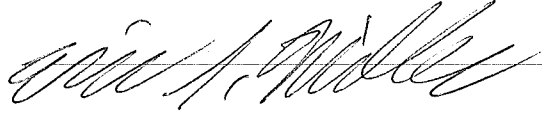
First of all, we would need 1,200 valid signatures from registered voters within the City of Mansfield whose signatures match their signatures on record with the Board of Election, and who are still living at the same address under which they registered. I have worked on statewide ballot initiatives gathering signatures a few times over the years. It takes time and patience to talk to people and first try to find out where they live. Then you must explain the merits of the petition you have before them to find out if they are willing to listen. And if they are willing to listen, are they willing to sign the petition? You dare not ask them if they are registered voters or if they have changed their address since registering, because instantly many get worried about exactly when they last voted, whether they've since moved, or whether there's something wrong with their registration. People read and worry about defective registrations leading to felony prosecutions in Florida and other places. Some people worry, "have I done something wrong". So, to avoid the loss of willing signers by delving into the subject of registration, you purposely do not verify anyone's registration before asking for their signature. Instead, if you need 1,200 valid signatures you make it your goal to get 1,500 signatures and hope that within that number you have enough valid registrations.

Next, it is hardest to get someone to sign a petition when they would have to pay additional taxes. I have helped get signatures for candidate petitions, and it is easy compared to getting signatures for a tax. I know this from actual experience. (Most of you City Council Members have never circulated a state-wide tax petition, so you probably did not consider that factor before telling us to circulate a petition instead of requesting a little help from you.) People need far more personal persuasion to sign for a new tax: everyone's default answer is "no, I'm against new taxes". Getting a signature involving a new tax requires persuading them that there is a serious problem that won't be solved unless they come up with the tax dollars on an emergency basis. Suggesting we get this issue back on the ballot by circulating a petition is like asking us to cut our grass with scissors instead of a lawnmower. If you view it as your job to support fire safety in Mansfield, I ask you to help us get the job done. Your choice is to get it back on the ballot now or wait at least 3 years and hope for a better citizens group than the one you have now. But as you know, "hope is not a plan".

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be more apparent to voters by then, but many of those who led and financed this unsuccessful initiative are over 70 years old, and you can't count on us to be around after 3 years, especially after subverting our effort to finish the job in the next few months.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric S. Miller", written over a horizontal line.

Eric S. Miller

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