

# File a Formal Complaint -

**Scoop** reported a day ago (Thu, 1 Dec at 1:02 PM) via Portal Meta

During the last election cycle, Friends of Underwood Park formed a PAC and placed two measures before the voters of Underwood, WA. Measure 1 was to form a parks and recreation district, Measure 2 was to fund the district to the tune of \$.20 per thousand dollars of assessed value. About the time the ballots went out the attached mailer landed in all of Underwood's mailboxes. It is filled with falsehoods and CANT never registered as a PAC, nor did they make their concerns known to the Friends prior to their mailing. While we did pass measure 1 with 64% approval, the funding failed with only 54% - it needed 60%. I feel that the illegal mailer cost the new parks district its funding. I spoke to Phil Stutzman yesterday, and plan to go to the printer and keep digging. I feel it is very unlikely that Mr. Miller acted alone. Please throw the book at CANT!

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## 4 Attachments

JPG [CANT Flyer-p...](#)  
( 1.38 MB )

JPG [CANT Flyer-p...](#)  
( 4.2 MB )

JPG [CANT Flyer-p...](#)  
( 3.27 MB )

JPG [CANT Flyer-p...](#)  
( 2.97 MB )

# UNDERWOOD TAX ALERT

## VOTE **NO** ON PROPOSITION 2: THE PARK TAX LEVY

Dear Fellow Underwood Neighbor;

We are a concerned group of Underwood citizens who just **CAN'T** make sense of Proposition #2 -- the Park Levy. It proposes to "levy" \$30,000 from about 420 households to basically support an obsolete 85 year-old school gym, a Post Office and cottage along with over 5 acres of park lands including tennis courts, and a horse riding arena that all are rarely used and in need of maintenance and replacement.

The County had been supporting this abandoned school and park site for many years and due to budget issues realized that this complex of old buildings and excess park lands in the very eastern portion of Skamania County was no longer sustainable and losing them over \$30,000 a year.

While we admire the volunteer groups efforts and sense of community they are trying to instill in Underwood we have to state that Underwood is a rural community that no longer has a school and **CAN'T** support this amount of improvement given its low density and population. This proposed tax would apply to your property for up to 6 years (per page 105 in the 2016 Voters Pamphlet) and is officially called the "*Proposed Skamania County Parks and Recreation District No. 1*". We urge you to vote NO on this proposal.

Our group is called "**CAN'T**" which is an acronym for **Citizens Against Needless Taxation**. It is for the following 10 reasons that we feel that the Community of Underwood **CAN'T** support Proposition 2 --the Park Levy:

**REASON 1.** Beyond the park the 3 buildings are also all very old and have much deferred maintenance and are in need of extensive Capital Improvements that Skamania County nor the Underwood Community can afford to maintain any longer. The community building is essentially a school gym that is over 85 years old and the other two buildings, the Post Office and "cottage" are both in very bad repair and in need of serious maintenance:

- The Cottage needs a new and expensive shake roof that will cost over \$5,000.
- The gym floors are 85 years old and need replacing and constant refinishing and are difficult and expensive to maintain even for a well-funded school.
- The heaters while operational are obsolete and a fire hazard. The Gym has inadequate exiting and does not comply with current fire codes nor does it have fire sprinklers, or adequate fire suppression systems. In order for its users to be safe this building needs to be inspected and either brought up to code or condemned.
- The Community building's plumbing is also 85 years old and its drinking water most likely contains high levels of lead which is unsafe and potentially carcinogenic. The water should be tested.

- Structurally the Gym building was designed circa 1925 and does not meet current building codes nor is it a safe structure especially during an emergency event. It was designed to have a 50-year life span and has well exceeded that. The entire building is constructed of wood --much of which is 2 x 4's. The siding is covered by ugly vinyl and underneath is likely the weather worn and rotted original wood siding.
- While well intended many of the volunteer improvements are unsafe and unpermitted. For instance there are "sound baffles" that are heavy fabric boards held onto the rafters 20' above the gym floor by plastic zip ties. Would you want your family in this gym during an earthquake when they all fall down?

**REASON 2. The Budget submitted by the Underwood Community Council (UCC) is incomplete and does not include any long term capital expenses while projecting unrealistic and unsustainable income:**

- The center has been running at over a \$30,000 net deficit for years which has been offset by the County and local volunteer work. Net deficit means that even after income the expenses exceeded the income by over \$30,000.
- The UCC is basing balancing their budgets upon the wishful thinking of receiving over \$20,000 of donations, fund-raisers (bake sales, garage sales, and grants).
- The volunteers by their own admission are "tired" and want more hired help. The cost of labor even with volunteers has already exceeded \$18,000 in 2015. The UCC has not included benefits or obligatory employee taxes that add an additional 35% to full time employees costs which is counter to Washington and Federal wage laws.
- There is nothing included in the UCC budget for long term expenses, either like new siding, new roofs, fire sprinklers plumbing, heating or other systems replacement. All HOA's or really any board or Commission that is charged with maintaining older buildings must have significant reserves that have a reserve account for the inevitable replacement and future large capital expenses. No such Reserve Study has been ordered by the UCC.
- The income is low and **CAN'T** support the expenses: The total "actual" income is only about \$15,000 without Grants, Fund Drives or Donations that haven't yet materialized. The "Cottage" only gets \$600 a month and the County gave the tenants a long term lease until 2021. The Community Center (the gym) has earned per the UCC a total of \$3200 in a full year of operation. The Post Office only brings in \$425 a month and they can cancel with only 90 days notice per their lease--and they have in the past threatened to do so as they are also running at a deficit.

**REASON 3: The Community Center at 85 years old is not a suitable building to be used for emergency shelter.** It would cost a half million or more to rebuild it make it structurally safe while meeting code for such use requiring seismic upgrading, new plumbing, a real generator, a new heat system, and real emergency gear--much like already exists across the street at the Skamania County fire house. In fact it would be cheaper to build a new building if we even needed one. This senseless duplication is unnecessary and we **CAN'T** allow it. Why **CAN'T** the Fire Station open its doors during emergencies?

**REASON 4.** The proposition and inclusion of all properties within the 98651 zip code is **proportionally unfair and inequitable**. Those 100 people that live within 1/2 mile to at most a mile away are the main users yet the proposed park district encompasses all properties within the 98651 zip code, some of which areas far as 6-7 miles away. The folks that are over 6 miles away within 98651 will probably never use any of the facilities.

**REASON 5.** The accepted American Planning Association (APA) standard for a park generally requires a population of 5,000 people within a mile of the subject park to support a neighborhood park of 5 acres--this standard is not met for Underwood. These neighborhood parks are generally associated with elementary schools for further efficiencies. The Underwood park only has a local population of 420 households with less than 800 full time residents within 5 miles of the park. The low population coupled with the rural low densities **CAN'T** support the expenses of a 5-acre park even in an urban area.

**REASON 6.** Many of the uses and much of the park are underutilized. Does a population of 800 really need a horse arena, tennis courts, and 5 acres of grass to water? Just the watering alone of a 5 acre grassy lawn would cost a residential household \$6000 a month in the summer. A comparable population of 800 people in an urban center typically **CAN'T** support much more than 1 acre of parkland even without expensive old buildings to maintain. A five -acre grassy park for such a small population without school usage is environmentally unsustainable and fiscally irresponsible.

**REASON 7.** What starts out as a tax assessment of \$20 per thousand or \$30,000 District-wide total tax levy could and probably will exponentially grow as capital expenses become known. Much like a Home Owner's Association the Board can add or ask for additional expenses beyond the initial \$30,000 and based on the long list of capital expenses and deferred maintenance items they will have to. This proposal is much like a Homeowners association but the beneficiaries are essentially in this case asking another building (6 miles away) to pay for their swell country club recreation center! We **CAN'T** allow this kind of boundary gerrymandering.

**REASON 8.** The Officers and Commissioners of the County Park and Recreation District who are running can be subject to legal action and can be held responsible, in court for negligence and fiscal irresponsibility. Once the new "park commissioners" realize that they would no longer be protected by the corporate veil of the UCC there may not be as many that want to remain in this "commissioner" position. There are five required by County Ordinance, some of which my go unfilled. Again the legal structure proposed in Proposition #2 it is much like that of a Home Owners Association (HOA) where officers and Board members can get sued for their fiscal and other alleged mistakes. Don't think it **CAN'T** happen-- other Commissioners and HOA Directors have been brought to court even in Skamania County. We don't need and **CAN'T** support the administrative let alone legal costs for 5 more Commissioners --as well meaning, beneficent, and civic-minded as they may intend to be.

**REASON 9.** Clearly there is excess land and facilities beyond that which a small community such as Underwood can support on its own without County support or a very large donation (like \$1 million). We suggest that an architect, planner and/or appraiser determine what the highest and best use is for the property and that a park proportional to the size, density and population be designed within the 6 acre parcel and that excess property be sold so the County is no longer in a budget deficit. It makes no sense to cling on to an architecturally insignificant and unsafe building as a community center for a community that has no fiscally responsible plan on how they can afford it. Maybe if the Underwood Community Center wishes to propose a smaller park and sell off the excess land so that the park was more in scale with its population and level of expenses a smaller

park may be sustainable. But a 5-6 acre park with an 85 year-old large obsolete building is an Albatross and unfortunately **CAN'T** be sustained by this tax levy and it is unfair and fiscally irresponsible to put this burden over so few people.

**REASON 10:** There are many other more worthy causes (if any of you have extra money burning a hole in your pockets) like helping poor people or giving to the hospital or to schools or paying for extra snowplows. Why do so few homes need to be obligated to maintain a redundant obsolete building and an oversized park?

We suggest that for all of these **10 REASONS** you **VOTE NO on PROP #2** and send this back to the County Commissioners for a fiscally responsible plan for the park property.

Citizens Against Needless Taxes  
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