

South Florida Sun-Sentinel.com

Amid decreasing property values, cities find balance

By Roy Gold

July 31, 2010

As some residents struggle with the disappointing reality of mortgages worth more than the appraised values of their homes, so too are cities working to strike a balance between fiscally responsible budget cuts and providing the services that residents need. Cities are focused on finding the best short- and long-term solutions to serious budget shortfalls, and this process involves many difficult decisions.

Unfortunately, the need for city services spikes up during a recession, just as the city's ability to pay for those services is strained to the max. For example, when faced with unemployment or a dip in income, parents who previously might have sent their children to private summer camps now look to city parks and recreation facilities for summer activities. Fire stations, police and other services experience an increase in demand during hard economic times, when municipalities are struggling more than ever to provide them.

Whether the debate is over trimming payrolls, raising taxes, privatization, cutting some services and saving others, or any of the other painful decisions cities are facing today, the smartest solutions require reviewing data and the knowledgeable input and collaboration among residents and their elected officials. Misinformation, deliberately inflating potential scenarios and politicizing the discussion are in no one's best interest at critical junctures like these.

Times are very difficult for some cities and less challenging for others. In any case, the decisions residents and elected officials make today will impact our communities for many years to come. Whatever the best solutions may be, there is no quick fix for budget shortfalls.

As president of the Broward League of Cities, I wish to underscore that it is in our collective best interest to make sure the decisions we make are well informed, sustainable, apolitical and get us back on track toward fiscal stability.

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