

Letter to the Community

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e of last week's (July 13) *The Excelsior Standard*, there was a humorous article penned by columnist Jason Offutt. It talked about his family taking a vacation in Branson, Mo. The City of Branson has a population of 10,520; with millions of visitors annually.

A few years ago, as a City Councilwoman, I had the opportunity to attend a conference and take a course on Priority Based Budgeting. One of the example communities was Branson, the first city in the state to adopt PBB. Most communities allocate the majority of their revenues to public safety and public infrastructure, as does Excelsior Springs. Providing our residents and visitors to the community with a safe environment to live and play is a priority in our community.

The Tourism Fund for Branson is 43% of their revenues. They will spend over \$2 million in tourism marketing this year. Their 2017/18 budget shows \$17,954,000 total capital from

tourism this year. The budget list line items such as \$1,297,000 for Water/Sewer projects *funded by Tourism Fund*.

What is keeping us from being a city like Branson? We have an incredible history, we have beauty areas, acclaimed golf course, and a great park system. We have well organized festivals. Regionally, we offer great attractions. We are minutes from Watkins Mill, one of the most frequently visited parks in our state. We are minutes from the Jesse James Farm Home and Museum, also garnering enormous tourism traffic. We had an incredible opportunity to play host to a large tourism crowd during the solar eclipse, where we can track an additional 1,000 people visiting the Hall of Waters during that weekend.

When you read the operating budget for the City of Branson, the first page quotes Rick Godwin, "One reason people resist change is because they focus on what they have to give up, instead of what they have to gain."

This isn't a letter about Branson. This is a letter about Excelsior Springs. This place matters. Our community is not just any place to visit, it is some place. Our history is unique. The Hall of Waters has been determined to hold National Treasure status by the Chicago office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. An office that has recognized the Hall of Waters as an endangered building. The Excelsior Springs Museum and Archives is equally important to our tourism because it tells the story of who we are.

Tourism is a great industry, bringing over \$16 billion to Missouri each year. I want our fair share of that! The Elms Hotel is under new management. I had the pleasure of meeting with three of the hotel's marketing staff last week. They wanted to tour the Hall of Waters and talk about the history of our town. We talked about partnerships. We talked about working together. The city, the hotel, the Downtown Excelsior Partnership, the Chamber of Commerce, the business community,

the school system, the residents. We are partners in creating the best possible place to live, work, and raise our families. Now it is time to invite others to come to Excelsior Springs and be a part of our history. It should be a priority. Everyone will gain.

There will be tours of the Hall of Waters and the Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives on Saturday, July 21 at noon and Saturday, July 28 at 6 p.m. These tours are being provided to show residents the repairs that are needed to the buildings and answer questions about the Museum Tax that is going to be on the August 7 ballot.

Property owners looking for more information can visit <http://museumtax.com>. It provides information for calculating how the tax will impact you.

For those residents that have let us know they have already voted for the tax in their absentee ballot, thank you, thank you, thank you for your YES vote! Please join them and me in voting yes for the Museum Tax in August.

—

Sonya Morgan
Councilwoman
City of Excelsior Springs, MO