

The Arts Mean Business



A recent study produced by Americans for the Arts provided a key lesson that communities that invest in the arts reap the additional benefits of jobs, economic growth, and a quality of life that positions those communities to compete in our 21st century creative economy. Business and community leaders worry about jobs and the economic performance of their community. How well are they competing in the high-stakes race to attract new businesses? Is the community a magnet for a skilled and creative workforce? The findings from “Arts & Economic Prosperity III” send a clear and welcome message: leaders who care about community and economic development can feel good about choosing to invest in the arts.

On Tuesday, August 7, voters in Excelsior Springs will be asked to approve a 30-cent tax levy on \$100 valuation for hospital, public health and museum purposes. The ballot is being presented to provide a dedicated funding source for needed improvements to the Hall of Waters and the Excelsior Springs Museum and Archives. These buildings are iconic for the community and are at the heart of our arts and culture industry. The sites regularly host events, including

educational exhibits that trace the city's history from its archaeology, to its waters, to its businesses, to displays about local veterans who have served our country.

The levy, if approved, would cost \$57 per year for the owner of a \$100,000 (market value) home and generate about \$462,000 a year. This is the median home value in Excelsior Springs; half of the homeowners will pay less than this and half will pay more.

The only resource the city has to make needed improvements to the Hall of Waters is the Capital Improvement Sales Tax. This fund provides important funding for the City to improve the delivery of city services (equipment replacements, building improvements, infrastructure upgrades) and due to the list of city wide needs, it does not seem reasonable to continue to make emergency repairs to the Hall of Waters, if we can never spend enough to solve the issues. A dedicated revenue source for the Hall of Waters and Museum will send the message that the public wants these buildings to be saved.

The Museum Tax will make it possible to see Historic Tax Credits and grant funds to reduce our local costs, IF and only IF the building supports either private tenants that bring jobs and private investment or sustains the mineral water history. These outside funding sources are not available to make improvements to a city hall. This tax proposal is intended to position the Hall of Waters to be a key element of our tourism industry and to move the building away from using city revenues that are needed to support city services.

Arts and culture are magnets for tourists, and tourism research repeatedly shows that cultural travelers stay longer and spend more. Whether serving the local community or out-of-town visitors, a vibrant arts and culture industry helps local businesses thrive.