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### Civility

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**“By the collision of different sentiments,  
sparks of truth are struck,  
and political light is obtained.**

Benjamin Franklin

However, today it appears that when there is a “collision of sentiments,” seeking “truth” is frequently ignored and political heat, not political light, results. Could the application of basic civility provide transformative “light” rather than destructive “heat?”

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### Waukee’s public safety, services & amenities – all for the daily cost of a \$5.83 Starbucks latte

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***“Most taxing bodies pull the old ‘we lowered the tax rate’ theme when in fact most are raising taxes. The tax rate is actually meaningless in terms of gauging whether taxes will be higher or lower.”***

Waukee’s FY95 to FY23 data was shared at Wednesday’s TACI Town Hall:

- **Tax Rate:** +0.46% (FY23, -1.5%)
- **Taxable Valuation:** +11.58% (FY23, +16.15%)
- **Property Tax Collections:** +11.57% (FY23, +14.41%)
- **Population:** +7,43%
- **Cost of Living (CPI-U):** +2.27%

During the interview, City Administrator Brad Deets and Finance Director Linda Burkhart reviewed the process used to develop the budget, the FY23 priorities established by the City Council, the sources and uses of city funds, the drivers of personnel costs, and Waukee’s growth.

It was noted that taxpayer participation in budget workshops and the special maximum levy hearing, was nil.

So is the increase in property tax collections, multiple times the increase in population, household income, and CPI justified? Are the costs to the family in a \$300,000 home for Waukee's public safety, services & amenities worth the daily cost of a \$5.83 Starbucks latte?

Relevant documents are being posted at the [Town Hall website](#).

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## What's the real issue? "A cleaner process" ... or something else?

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At a special meeting yesterday, on a 5-1 vote (Supervisor McCoy dissenting) the Polk County Board of Supervisors passed a "Resolution approving creation of the Polk County Behavioral Health and Disability Services Department and essential positions."

"A cleaner process" and "getting ride of a layer of bureaucracy" were two suggested reasons for changing the responsibility for developing and overseeing a local network of services and support for people who have

mental health and other disabilities, from a private, nonprofit organization, governed by a community board, to the Board of Supervisors.

Questions pending:

- Why was Supervisor McCoy the only one asking questions?
- Why was Liz Cox (CEO, Polk County MHDS Region), one of the two individuals not taken from non-profit Region to the Polk County payroll?
- If the County was working toward a smooth transition, why was the CEO locked out of her office (and the MHDS Region files) following the special meeting?
- Will the new organization have public members as the 13 other state MHDS regions do? Apparently, state legislation was proposed last night to require such.
- How are existing contract requirements between the State and the existing MHDS Region to this new Polk County Department going to be addressed?
- What assets, in addition to staff, may the County seek from the Region?
- What will happen to the other existing operations, homes, services, and assets of the existing non-profit?
- What is the urgency? The existing structure has been in place since 1977.

The proceedings of the special board meeting may be viewed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWbYEik4SWU>

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## Central Iowa Water Works

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During Wednesday's TACI Town Hall, City Administrator Brad Deets discussed Waukee's support of the Central Iowa Water Works initiative.

"First and foremost, we are supportive of the regional system. From our purview we don't believe, necessarily, that it is going to reduce the cost of water; we do think, long term, that it has implications that it will reduce future increases in the cost of water. There are limited sources of that water, and

there is a generality that if we work together, and have a larger system, then your efficiencies are going to be better and your costs, although they may not go down dramatically, they shouldn't increase dramatically either."

As of today, the following central Iowa communities have approved resolution of support:

- ✓ Altoona
- ✓ Ankeny
- Bondurant
- ✓ Clive
- ✓ Des Moines Water Works  
    (Includes customers in:)  
        Alleman, Berwick Water  
        Cumming, Pleasant Hill  
        Unincorporated Polk Co,  
        Runnels, Windsor Hts.
- ✓ Grimes
- ✓ Johnston
- ✓ Norwalk
- Polk City
- ✓ Urbandale Water Utility  
    Warren Water District
- ✓ Waukee
- ✓ West Des Moines Water Works
- ✓ Xenia Rural Water District

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## In the Legislative Hopper

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The last TACI Topics noted that "With significant elections upcoming, it appears that every effort is being made to adjourn by the 100<sup>th</sup> day of the session (April 19<sup>th</sup>) when per diem expenses end for legislators."

Such may not be the case.

For the first 100 days of the session, Iowa legislators receive per-diem payments consisting of \$126.75 per day for Polk County lawmakers, and \$169 for others. They also receive a base salary of \$25,000, plus

mileage reimbursement of \$0.39/mile.

Now, quickly approaching the end of legislator per diem, where do things stand?

Nine budget bills drafted by the House now reside in the Senate Appropriations Committee, awaiting further action. The Senate however has yet to send, or return, a single budget proposal to the House.

House Speaker Grassley noted, "We're in a bit of a holding pattern until that happens, which thankfully has allowed me to get some work done to get the farm ready for planting season."

Ultimately, any differences that exist between House and Senate bills will need to be resolved before adjournment. And, in addition to appropriations, the Legislature and the Governor have matters they want to be addressed before the session concludes. Enter the "Standings" bill, a "catchall" that appears annually in the waning hours of the session that address these issues

Stay tuned as it's not over until final adjournment, "Sine Die."

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## The TACI In-Basket

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### **Re: Scaling up Civility:**

The in-basket has been filled with positive comments regarding the civility section of "TACI Topics."

*"This is the most critical issue our society is facing!"*  
*"What is being done to scale it up and amplify it?"*

Any suggestions?

### **Re: Tax Levy vs Collections:**

Readers are uniformly in agreement that placing the emphasis on "maintaining or reducing taxes" (i.e, the levy) rather than actually dollars collected is, to use civil language, "disingenuous."

After Wednesday night's Town Hall, where SF634 on local budgets & property tax transparency was discussed, participants wrote,

*"You are wrong about hard capping annual increases in property tax collections. The Iowa Code limits various levies, it should be changed to limit various tax collections. That is the only way to limit taxes that are going up three times my income."*

*"Interesting that the Waukee starts with the levy. It seems "zero based budgeting" implies starting with a blank sheet, not last year's budget, to determine community needs and their costs, then determining the levy. Not the other way around."*

### **Re: PK-12 Education in Iowa:**

*"Einstein said, 'The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.' It is time for a systemic change in Iowa's public education system. We just seem to be sending good money after bad results."*

*"Resistance and fears changing PK-12? Follow the money"*

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