

**NEBRASKA TAXPAYERS FOR FREEDOM ISSUE PAPER
ANALYSIS OF PAPIO-MISSOURI RIVER NRD FY 2018-2019 BUDGET.**

BACKGROUND. Every year that NTF analyzes the Papio-Mo. River NRD budget, we note the same trends that victimize taxpayers. Its budgets regularly overestimate the revenues needed or subsequently expended and regularly project too much revenue required for the next fiscal year, a continual escalation that artificially raises the property tax requirement. In addition, continual overspending abounds on line items that are not the core responsibility or obligation of natural resource districts.

NEGATIVE POINTS FOUND. The budget shows \$6 million more in cash on hand currently, more than necessary. The NRD retains too much cash on hand, thereby fueling increases in the next budget. The bloated Project Reserve Fund of \$15 million inflates the amount of property tax dollars required. Likewise, \$33.8 million overbudgeted from last fiscal year, with only a little over 55% utilized. The NRD spent 110.9% of property tax budgeted from the General Fund, an embarrassing amount. Of 13 separate revenue accounts, the NRD actually accrued much more than budgeted in FY 2018, an indication of poor budgeting of anticipated revenue. Of the expense accounts, the NRD overspent on 2 and woefully underspent on several, again pointing to poor budgeting (p. 1). Employee health insurance premiums would rise about 5%, testifying to the need for employees to pay a greater percentage of their health insurance costs (p. 5). Lobbying



expenses, \$110,400, seem exorbitant (p. 5). Several line items under Special Planning/Engineering/Recycling are not defined clearly, e.g., recycling projects, administrative policies review. Identical amounts for office carpeting and office painting appear in the last fiscal year budget, so these expensive carryovers boost the property tax requirement (p.5). Similarly, the monies for cash on hand and operations reserve boost the property tax load, resembling a slush fund (pp. 13, 42). Likewise with the \$2.4 million carryover for

dams in the Watershed Fund. The Southern Sarpy Watershed Partnership continually shows a bloated operating reserve, \$782,322 for FY 2019 (p. 43). No justification given for a half million watershed dam re-study (p. 11). Information support programs overbudgeted the last fiscal year by \$103,616 (p. 9), Omaha levee certification by \$402,867, and the Western Sarpy/ Clear Creek construction by \$700,000 (p. 12). In too many accounts, figures indicate that, although amounts spent were less than initially budgeted in FY 2018, the NRD nevertheless budgeted similar high amounts in FY 2019, again boosting property tax requirements. Disturbing was viewing the \$194,000 expenditure for dam repair work so soon at dam sites like Flanagan Lake (p. 14). The City of Omaha should have funded the mitigation site design at Flanagan Lake (p. 28). We question why these expenses not listed in individual dam budgets. There is no apparent reason why the NRD is spending \$100,000 to dredge a private development SID lake (p. 20). State grant amounts obtained much less than estimated (p. 13). Program 4195 cost share expense last fiscal year was \$45,000, none spent, yet this year there appears a \$40,000 appropriation. \$203,850 seems a too expensive price for a new equipment shed (p. 21). The original PCWP plan in 2009 projected developer fees from 2018-2020 at \$15.7 million, but much less now is projected. The NRD should increase developer fees (p. 29).

POSITIVE POINTS FOUND. Machinery and equipment costs fell significantly (p. 4). Anticipated federal grant amounts would increase by 16% (p. 10).

NTF SUGGESTIONS.

- End service awards and leave paid out, saving \$50,000 (p 3).
- Control postage costs, which would skyrocket by \$5,000 (p. 3).
- End several dues payments and memberships, due to increase by 4.5% (p. 5).
- End spending for the Waterloo volunteer fire dept., saving \$30,000 (p. 5).
- End participation in the Progress Omaha Partnership, saving \$25,000 (p. 5).
- End contributions to Keep Omaha Beautiful, saving \$25,000 (p. 5).
- End information support programs like fish rulers, saving \$70,500, a 235% budget increase (p. 6).
- End expenditures on exhibits, displays, and signs, saving \$8,000 (p.6).
- End expenditures on newspaper ads and subscriptions (p. 7).
- Spending on special events and festivals would rise by 38%. End spending on the Great Park Pursuit, saving \$5,000, Earth Day, saving \$5,000, the 2020 National Envirothon, saving \$5,000, Waterworks, saving \$3,000, and co-sponsoring events, \$3,000 (p. 8).

- Halt expenditures on general education programs, events like family nature nights, saving \$37,000 (p. 9).
- End the Wildlife Habitat Program, saving \$50,000 (p. 26).
- End the Celebrate Trees Program, saving \$75,000 (p. 26).
- Projects and their costs carried over from previous budgets should require a new board vote.

TAKE ACTION NOW. More accurate budgeting and eliminating non-basic services would take pressure off this NRD budget and save millions, allowing the NRD board to lower the tax rate. Lobby your NRD board member to adopt NTF budget suggestions and lower the NRD property tax rate, now set at about .038c per \$100 of valuation.

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