



April 10, 2019

Hand-delivered

To Members of the Tarrant County House Legislative Delegation,

On behalf of all of Fort Worth, thank you for your service to the State of Texas and your leadership in the Texas House.

As the House begins consideration of House Bill 2, I felt it was important for me to give the perspective of the City of Fort Worth and how this legislation, as currently proposed, would impact your city and your constituents.

As the 15th largest city in the nation and one of the fastest growing large cities, Fort Worth's exponential growth creates an increased demand on city services and infrastructure. While we continue to build upon our efforts to be one of the best managed cities in the country and excellent stewards of taxpayer dollars, we must also make effective budget decisions that ensure the long-term protection and quality of life for Fort Worth residents.

As Mayor (and taxpayer) of Fort Worth, I also understand the burden property taxes have not only on our citizens, but also our city's future. As the former Tax Assessor for Tarrant County, I am uniquely aware of the intricacies of our property tax system in Texas. Any improvements that make the system less cumbersome and friendlier to our taxpayers are welcome. Most of the measures outlined in HB2 are reasonable and it is my belief that when we all work together, the legislature can pass a bill that improves the property tax system, while enabling cities to continue to be the economic engine for the State of Texas.

Currently, 55 percent of the City of Fort Worth's general fund is comprised of property tax revenues. The police and fire departments make up 56 percent of our general fund. In Fort Worth, our property tax revenues only cover the cost of public safety services. We will also be up front and honest that if HB2 passes at the current proposed 2.5 percent rollback, Fort Worth would have a shortfall in FY2020 of at least \$4.2 million. These cuts will most likely result in very specific budget decisions that minimize the impact to citizens but also ensure we are not making unwise decisions for future infrastructure in Fort Worth.

A few high-level principles we will use when operating under a budget deficit if the current version of HB 2 were to pass.

BETSY PRICE, MAYOR

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1. We would not make staffing cut to police and fire employees – but instead we would not make the necessary increases to the number of police and fire employees that are needed to keep up with current growth. **According to a comprehensive staffing study completed in April 2019, our police department needs to add 153 police officers now which is a \$30 million cost.**
2. Over the last several budget cycles, we have added more money into our budget to maintain city infrastructure, including city roads and city facilities. Infrastructure is a critical issue across the country and in Fort Worth we will not make shortsighted decision that amount to cuts to our infrastructure that may not be felt immediately but are incredibly damaging over the next 10 to 20 years. Some cities may be forced to cut capital expenditure that negatively impacts infrastructure. Our position would likely result in difficult decisions that would focus on other important programs and staffing cuts.
3. Several critical expenditures will impact FY2020 budget including **funding our pension solution**, that as you remember, kept us from coming to Austin for a solution to restructure our pension and prevent the fund from going bankrupt in the next 20 or 30 years.
4. Additional programs and expenses include our neighborhood revitalization program, pay for performance salaries for our employees, cutting services in important departments such as parks, libraries and code compliance.

Lastly, the City of Fort Worth has made the concerted effort to lower the property tax rate by 7 cents in the past three years. We strongly believe that every dollar must be spent wisely. We use revenue from growth to support the increased need in city services because of our exponential population growth. I hear from citizens everyday about their struggle and concerns over the rising values of their homes and the impact this has on their property tax bill. The current proposal will not provide meaningful tax relief for our residents, and I hope that we look closely at solutions that will provide real tax relief that citizens want to see.

I remain committed to working with you to find a solution that gives taxpayers tangible relief, without dangerously hampering cities ability to provide basic city services, most notably, public safety and transportation infrastructure. Thank you for your service to Fort Worth and Tarrant County. We know it is an incredible sacrifice to you and your families to be in Austin. Please know your work and public service is appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Betsy Price', written in a cursive style.

Betsy Price
Mayor