

TwinCities PIONEERPRESS

## OPINION

### **Joe Soucheray: St. Paul spends money it doesn't have and then has to go chasing after it**

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In\$ight St. Paul, which set an example by not spending money they didn't have on a name or a logo, issued last week an 18-page report on the financial failings of the city of St. Paul. The authors of the report found themselves doing the Lord's work, because nobody else has.

We are in dire straits.

Using data from 22 research papers written by Greg Blees, as yet unpublished, the main problems in St. Paul are simple and inexcusable. The city keeps spending money it doesn't have and then has to go chasing after it.

It is no wonder that St. Paul has the highest property taxes in the state and the highest sales tax.

Blees was city budget director in the 1980s under George Latimer and later a city council financial analyst. The In\$ight group includes developer John Mannillo; Dave Beal, former Pioneer Press business columnist; Donna Swanson, a recent executive of the St. Paul Police Foundation; lobbyist Julian Loscalzo; and Carl Michaud, a former assistant county administrator for Hennepin County.

Their advice is sound and sobering. For example, don't invest in new parks initiatives like a Mississippi River Balcony, the Mississippi Learning Center or a regional multi-sport athletic complex. The city must also ween itself away from supporting projects through incentives to developers known as TIF, tax increment financing.

"If we don't have enough money to maintain our parks facilities;' Blees was quoted in Frederick Melo's reporting of In\$ight's findings, "why are we putting in the budget more money to build new facilities?"

A fellow who only observes feels somewhat vindicated by In\$ight's findings.

Mayor Melvin Carter is too expensive. From the report: "... city leaders did not help their constituents financially from 2016 to 2024, when the certified property tax levies increased 97.4%, from \$105.6 million to \$208.5 million."

The report does not necessarily indict Carter; there are always caveats. But he does not seem to adopt the school of leadership where not spending money is just as virtuous as spending it. His personal staff alone comprises 16 people.

Really? In a city with a shrinking population and a depleted downtown tax base?

Couldn't a chief of staff also serve as office manager? And couldn't a director of communications also be the press secretary? Five will get you 10 that there isn't much difference between a director of business engagement and the executive project lead for redevelopment.

Come on.

And if an ink-stained wretch might offer In\$ight another money- saving idea, end all city government programs that cannot be measured for results.

God only knows how many others are employed in Carter's Cabinet overseeing programs with meaningless titles. Meaningless because there are no metrics in place to gauge the results or achievements of various noble- sounding diversity, equity and inclusion projects.

It happens at the state level on an even greater scale. The Walz administration has given \$100 million to 135 nonprofits to work on the homelessness problem. No metrics.

Where is that money? Who has it? What are the results expected to be?

We'll stick with the city. Gov. Tim Walz could soon enough be everybody's problem.

The In\$ight report is compelling and important. It was published in the Pioneer Press on Oct. 30. Make every effort to read it and then contact your representative on the least diverse city council in America and tell them: We can't afford you.

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