

From: [Andrew Cohen](#)
To: [CityRecorder](#)
Subject: Public Comment City Council Meeting
Date: Monday, December 11, 2023 9:39:08 AM
Attachments: [City of Salem Revenue Task Force.docx](#)

Hello,

I would like to present the attached as my public comment for the City of Salem Council meeting occurring today December 11th. I will sign up for in person testimony as well. Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you!

Andrew Cohen
Ward 4

City of Salem Council Meeting
Comments on the City of Salem Revenue Task Force
December 11th, 2023

Good evening Mr. Mayor, Councilors, City of Salem Staff, and citizens,

For the record my name is Drew Cohen, I hold a Master of Public Administration, and am the City of Salem's Ward 4 citizen budget committee representative.

The reason for my testimony tonight is threefold: first, I'll offer recommendations for the revenue task force; second, I'll offer commentary of the recently failed employee payroll tax; and third, I'll offer suggestions for the upcoming budget proposal phase.

The last two council sessions have focused on the makeup of the proposed revenue task force, and I believe it is important to have equal representation in this task force, i.e., it would be unfair if there were 10 members of Ward 4, one member of Ward 2 and zero members of Ward 8. Here is my recommendation: There are eight wards, each ward should have three representatives, which would bring the task force to 24 people, and include 2-4 alternates. This would bring a grand total of 26-28 members to this task force in line with other councilors remarks.

To achieve this goal, I believe the first step would be to have members pair up with Wards that aren't geographically connected (i.e., Ward 8 with 6, 7 with 5, etc.). This will have the effect of engaging in smaller discussion groups with people who wouldn't normally connect, i.e. West with North Salem, South with Central Salem. Secondly, to address the learning curve for task force members and the limited window of opportunity to discuss these matters, I believe that city staff or Moss Adams could create homework packets for each member, outlining the history of Salem's budget and potential revenue options, why there is now a large need for revenue, and how our options compare to other like-sized cities in the state.

I have two questions that I would like this group to consider: first, regarding non-English speaking residents of Salem – to fully include them, who during these meeting would translate different languages, and who would pay for translation services? Second, this body has just eliminated several fees (for example: no late or parking fees at the library, and free bus tickets for youths), are you going to place some guardrails on this revenue task force? Please also be wary of the law of unintended consequences, where raising fees will lower overall revenue. One example would be increasing fees on summer camps or other parks and recreation activities, that will lower the participation of families and then lower overall revenue.

Regarding the recently failed employee payroll tax, I think it is necessary for this body to engage in completing a post-mortem on the tax. It is important to understand why this effort failed if we are to gain clarity for any future increase in fees or taxes. For instance, did this tax fail because it was poorly communicated to the members of the city? Did it fail because it was too regressive (i.e., everyone pays one rate vs having an income-based model like income taxes)? Did it fail because it wasn't given to "the people" to begin with and therefore people voted 'no' based on principle? These are only some of the important questions that need to be addressed before the revenue task force completes their recommendation if this process is to have credibility.

Lastly, as we approach the budget creation phase of next year's fiscal budget here are some recommendations. The State of Oregon requires each agency to submit 10% reduction options with their budget. This provides the Governor the opportunity to move around general fund dollars to support her vision and new initiatives. This is also an opportunity to view potential reductions to programs that are not working well or streamline duplicative efforts. This is currently not mandated for agency directors; however, I think it is prudent for the council to authorize this step in the budget process.

It is also important that this council leverage Marion County and the State of Oregon in assisting with some of Salem's expenditures. I strongly urge the Mayor and Councilors to consult with our Legislative body and Commissioners, especially with the advent of the 2024 Legislative Session, to lobby for more resources to address the unsheltered community in Salem, and for fairness in using city resources. I also recommend that this council continue to engage with the Salem Chamber of Commerce and SEDCOR to increase economic development with the city's business sector to increase more revenue.

Thank you for your time and I welcome your questions and feedback.

Sincerely,

Drew Cohen, MPA
City of Salem, Ward 4 Citizen Budget Committee Representative