



L&T Publisher Earl Watt

Wednesday evening, Mayor Joe Denoyer provided an explanation as to why the City of Liberal used the half-cent sales tax to purchase a very expensive traffic light system at the corner of 15th and Western.

Denoyer stated that the intersection was within a mile-and-a-half from Eisenhower Middle School, and stated student safety demanded that the lights be installed.

West Middle School and Liberal High School are practically the same distance from that intersection, and that never led to the need for a light at this intersection, the only difference being students traveled south to attend classes and back north to go home. A reversal of that traffic pattern does not instantly create a greater hazard.

Denoyer also claimed that the City is “protecting the property owners from bearing a financial burden because of new schools.”

Every Liberal property owner is also a USD No. 480 property owner. Every one of them. Claiming to be protecting these people as if they are not the same people makes no sense.

If a street light is necessary, making the same group of people pay for the upgrade through the City rather than the District didn't protect any of us. It just seems a lot easier for the City to spend the school's sales tax dollars rather than their own, which in the end, all belong to the same community.

Even though the source is gained through a sales tax, which was intended primarily to pay the bond, it does not decrease the burden on anyone, and the presumption that the district was aware may come as a surprise to many. There was no vote by the School Board to request or endorse the City-only decision to install the light and charge it to the school sales tax.

While the interlocal agreement was done with cooperation to allow the City to collect the tax on the District's behalf, it was never intended to give the City carte blanche decision-making on the use of those funds, but this is not a first.

The City has taken great liberties with the 1-cent sales tax, varying widely from the original intent and ignoring the public's priorities while spending money on items never discussed or recommended by the public or groups.

Pershing and Pine never had a street light, and it is directly across the street from South Middle School. Second and Western never had a light, and it is directly across the street from Liberal High School. Claiming student safety for a light more than a half mile from a new school simply doesn't make sense when the City never addressed these other areas. Now that the City had the school's money, they had no problem spending it.

Denoyer also took exception to the phrase that the District was "at the mercy" of the City.

But the interlocal agreement is clear. These are "City Infrastructure projects" and the responsibility of the City to complete. That puts the District clearly at the City's mercy.

