



Executive Summary: Complete SEA 1 Impact Toolkit

Overview

This toolkit provides municipalities with professional, credible tools to communicate the real-world impacts of SEA 1 while maintaining constructive relationships with state legislators. The goal is informed dialogue about the consequences of policy decisions being made for local communities, not political combat.

Using the City of Goshen's \$33.6 million in cuts as a working example, the materials in this toolkit have been created to help communities tell their story effectively while maintaining professional credibility and focusing on community impact.

In this toolkit you will find talking points and examples including:

- Detailed Toolkit Overview
- Legislator Letter Examples
- Mayor/Council Op-Ed Examples
- Community Member Letter to the Editor Example
- Social Media Examples
- Public Forum Talking Points

For full customization, we've included figures that will be helpful for you to consider gathering:

- Total dollar amount of cuts and suspensions
- Specific high-impact projects (public safety, infrastructure, community services)
- Number and type of staff positions affected
- Timeline of when impacts occur
- Five-year projection of additional cuts needed

It may also be helpful to develop local angles of importance like:

- Most compelling public safety impact for your community
- Community services that resonate with families and seniors in your area
- Infrastructure needs specific to your municipality
- Vulnerable populations most affected by cuts
- Economic development implications

We are also encouraging municipalities to think broadly about the regional coordination opportunities. These include, but are not limited to:

- Sharing aggregate impact data across municipalities
- Coordinating timing of communications
- Developing shared talking points for common challenges
- Supporting each other's community meetings and forums

By documenting specific impacts, sharing community stories, and coordinating regional responses, municipalities can ensure that state policymakers understand the full implications of revenue limitations on essential services. This foundation creates opportunities for future collaboration on solutions that balance fiscal responsibility with community needs.

Success requires sustained effort, regional coordination, and unwavering focus on community impact over political positioning. With these tools and principles, municipalities can effectively advocate for their residents while maintaining the professional relationships and vital partnerships needed for future collaboration.

For ease of customization, you can obtain the entire toolkit in Word by reaching out to Jennifer Simmons at jsimmons@aimindiana.org or send your request to aim@aimindiana.org.

Note: Text in orange denotes a stat which should be plugged in from your municipality.

Toolkit Components

ONE-PAGER

Purpose: Internal alignment and consistent messaging

Key Features:

- Core message framework emphasizing impact over politics
- Q&A for common questions and political policy scenarios
- Tone guidelines balancing empathy with factual presentation
- Quick reference to specific local impacts

Key Message: Acknowledge policy intent while documenting service impacts.

LEGISLATOR LETTER TEMPLATES

Purpose: Formal notification of impacts to state legislators

Key Features:

- Professional tone recognizing campaign promises fulfilled
- Specific dollar amounts and project details
- Before/after comparison of community goals vs. current reality
- Five-year outlook showing escalating impacts
- Request for ongoing dialogue, not policy reversal

Key Message: "We're not asking you to reverse position, but you should know the impact on your constituents."

MAYOR/COUNCIL OP-ED TEMPLATES

Purpose: Public education about service cuts and their implications

Key Features:

- Personal, accessible tone explaining complex budget impacts
- Specific examples that resonate with families
- Balanced acknowledgment of tax relief goals with service realities

Key Message: "Property tax relief is understandable, but here's what we're losing."

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR TEMPLATE FROM COMMUNITY MEMBER

Purpose: Grassroots perspective on disappointed expectations

Key Themes Might Include:

- Written from taxpayer perspective who supported tax relief
- Emphasis on minimal individual savings vs. significant service losses
- Personal stories about cut services affecting families
- Questions whether this was the intended outcome

Key Message: "This wasn't what we voted for — the costs outweigh the benefits."

SOCIAL MEDIA TEMPLATES

Purpose: Ongoing public communication and engagement

Key Features:

- Platform-specific messaging
- Visual content suggestions and carousel templates

Key Message: "These aren't budget numbers — they're real impacts on real families and taxpayers who expect to get a certain value for their tax dollars."

PUBLIC FORUM TALKING POINTS

Purpose: Town/City council meetings and community presentations

Key Features:

- Opening remarks for different audience types
- Handling difficult questions and hostile audiences
- Visual aids and storytelling elements
- Audience-specific approaches (families, seniors, businesses)
- Emergency response planning for challenging situations

Key Message: "Transparency is the foundation of good government."

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Strategic Messaging Framework

Core Principles

1. *Acknowledge Intent*

- Respect policy goals and democratic process.
- Recognize legitimate taxpayer concerns.
- Avoid personal attacks on legislators.

2. *Document Reality*

- Use specific dollar amounts and project details.
- Focus on service impacts, not political positions.
- Maintain factual accuracy and professional tone.

3. *Emphasize Impact*

- Connect budget cuts to real family experiences.
- Highlight public safety and infrastructure priorities.
- Show long-term consequences of delayed investments.

Message Hierarchy

Primary Message: SEA 1 forces impossible choices between fiscal responsibility and essential services.

Supporting Messages:

- Property tax caps don't eliminate burden. They shift it to income taxes.
- Growing communities are hit hardest but all municipalities face constraints.
- Public safety and infrastructure are most affected, and most expensive to restore when neglected due to loss of funding.
- These cuts represent years of careful community planning now abandoned.

Tone Guidelines

- Professional but Personal: Use data and facts but connect to stories.
- Respectful but Pointed: Acknowledge policy intent while showing real consequences.
- Local but Coordinated: Tell your community's story within statewide context.
- Factual but Emotional: Let the impacts speak for themselves without inflammatory language.

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Key Messages and Message Delivery Tips

Core Message Framework

What SEA 1 Does: Artificially and abruptly limits property tax revenue growth at a time when municipalities face constantly rising costs for materials, labor, and essential services.

Clear Position for Municipal Leaders: While we respect the governor and our state representatives for fulfilling a campaign promise, the real-world impact forces impossible choices between essential services that residents depend on.

Key Talking Points

- **Communities have been operating lean for years.**
 - Example #1: Dyer Utilizes Volunteers for its Parks Department.
 - Example #2: Whitestown cross trains police officers to assist the fire department as needed.
- **Communities are experiencing rising costs for materials (exacerbated by tariffs), pressure to keep pace on competitive public safety salaries, and aging infrastructure that requires steady investment.**
 - Example #1: When the state of Indiana increased starting salaries for state troopers, municipalities were forced to dramatically increase patrolman salaries to avoid losing talented officers to the state.
 - Example #2: Even with passing a Wheel Tax, it has been difficult to execute some grants, such as Community Crossings, because of the rapid rise in cost and availability of certain materials.
- **Growing communities are hit hardest, but smaller towns without income tax options also suffer significantly.**
 - Municipalities across Indiana have limited options to replace revenue streams.
 - Towns to reference as examples: Ferdinand, Oldenburg, Ingalls, Delphi, Syracuse, Corydon, Sheridan, Aurora, and New Palestine.

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- **Ultimately, property tax reductions shift the burden to income taxpayers.**
 - Example #1: For current renters who desire to buy homes, this shift sets them further behind as it creates more demand and hits their paycheck harder, preventing them from saving for a down payment.
 - Example #2: For renters, there will be no property tax relief. However, they will experience the burden of additional taxes necessary to make up for the loss to property tax revenues. Effective this year, there is a new tax deduction for rental properties, but this won't reduce rents. It might increase supply to slow the growth of rents. With other offsets it is unlikely to give any significant relief to rental owners.

What This Could Mean for Services:

- **Public Safety:** Delayed police/fire stations, understaffed departments, longer response times
- **Infrastructure:** Deteriorating roads and inadequate utility systems
- **Community Services:** Closed amenities like pools, reduced programming, eliminated positions, less financial and in-kind support for local events, and festivals

Frequently Asked Questions & Responses

General Questions

Q: Why can't cities and towns just cut wasteful spending?

A: Across the state, we've been operating lean for years, funding only essential services. The projects we're cutting aren't luxuries — they're priorities shared by our community like [insert a few priorities here (fire station, new park, new road, added public safety personnel)] that are costly investments for our community.

Q: Isn't this just about property tax relief?

A: While the call for property tax relief is understandable, SEA 1 doesn't eliminate taxes — it shifts the burden to other taxpayers. For example, young people who are unable to afford a new home could struggle even more. This measure reduces property taxes but shifts the burden to income taxes, removing capacity for future buyers to afford a downpayment. Meanwhile, it will force cuts to the very services that make communities safe and attractive places to live and work.

Q: Can't you find the money elsewhere?

A: Municipalities have limited revenue options. When property tax growth is capped below inflation, essential services must be cut. The General Assembly has challenged locals to utilize revenue raising tools at their disposal, as well as to be creative when identifying additional revenue options. Our hope is that legislators will help us put their words into action by authorizing additional local option revenues in the coming years.

Leading or Disingenuous Questions

Q: Isn't this just political theater to blame Governor Braun and the legislature?

A: Governor Braun fulfilled a campaign promise, and we understand his public policy stance. However, we have a responsibility at all times, but especially during the annual budget process, to show residents in our communities the real-world impact of this policy. These aren't political talking points — they're concrete cuts to services people depend on.

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Q: Why didn't you plan better for this?

A: We began planning earlier this year when SEA 1 was proposed, which is why we're able to show specific impacts. Good fiscal management means being transparent about what services can and cannot be provided within budget constraints.

Q: Couldn't you have found efficiencies instead of cutting programs?

A: We continuously look for efficiencies, but there's a limit to how much can be cut from already lean operations. When you're forced to eliminate **[\$xx] thousand/million** in projects, you're well beyond efficiency improvements. **[xx]%** of our budget is dedicated to public safety. If we are committed to making public safety cuts our last resort, this means we will most certainly have to cut many services and programs people care about and deserve.

Specific Questions

Q: How much will my taxes actually go down?

A: The savings for individual taxpayers are modest — in some cases around \$25 per month for the average homeowner. Meanwhile, we're cutting **[\$xx] thousand/million** in services. The math doesn't add up to meaningful relief for what we're losing.

Q: Why not cut staff instead of services?

A: With personnel typically being a municipality's number one expense, we have already reduced headcount by **[number of them]**. But you can't run a fire department without firefighters or maintain roads without equipment operators. At some point, you're cutting muscle, not fat.

Q: What would you do differently?

A: We'd target tax relief to those who need it most (seniors, disabled residents, families in financial distress) rather than applying blanket caps that force service cuts. We'd also ensure municipalities have adequate alternative revenue sources.

Q: Isn't this just fear-mongering?

A: These cuts are already happening. In communities all around the state, critical projects like road construction and public safety investment have stopped. **[Reference preferred example above from other community.]** Here in our community, **[insert best example of cut here]**. This isn't fear-mongering, it's documentation of current reality.

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Presenting on or Answering Questions Regarding SEA 1 – Helpful Tips

DO:

- Acknowledge that communities have been lean for a long time.
- Show empathy for taxpayers' concerns about property taxes.
- Use specific, concrete examples of impacts.
- Emphasize public safety and infrastructure as top priorities.
- Frame as difficult but necessary choices.

DON'T:

- Attack Governor Braun or legislators personally when discussing policy disagreements with his property tax campaign promises.
- Use inflammatory political language.
- Dismiss taxpayer concerns about property taxes.
- Make promises about what might be restored.
- Blame–shift without acknowledging policy rationale.

Quick Reference: [INSERT YOUR COMMUNITY NAME AND INFORMATION HERE]

- Total Cuts:
- Public Safety:
- Infrastructure:
- Community Services:
- Staff Positions Cut:
- Staff Position Deferred:

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EXAMPLE: Letter to State Legislators

[Date]

The Honorable [Legislator Name] [Address]
[City, State ZIP]

Dear [Senator/Representative] [Last Name],

As we move through the 2026 budget process, I am writing to inform you of the impact that SEA 1 – 2025 is having on the City of Goshen and the residents we both represent. While I understand that you and other state leaders fulfilled an important campaign promise with this legislation, I believe it is important that you understand the real-world consequences for the services your constituents depend on.

With SEA 1 's passage, Goshen has been forced to suspend or postpone \$33.6 million in critical infrastructure and public safety projects that were carefully planned to meet our community's growing needs. These are not luxury items or wasteful spending — they are essential investments in the safety and well-being of our constituents.

The following are the proposed cuts I have shared with the city council as we plan for 2026. These keep the City within our financial constraints and continue to deliver the best we can on the service level expected in Goshen.

- South Fire Station (\$12 million): We have suspended construction of a needed fire station to serve Goshen's rapidly growing south side, particularly the area between Kercher Road and County Road 42. Without this station, emergency response times will remain slower than recommended standards, placing residents at increased risk during medical emergencies and fires.
- Additional Public Safety Positions (\$394,000 annually): We have canceled plans to hire six additional firefighter/paramedics needed to staff the new station and meet national standards.
- Police Evidence Storage Facility (\$2.4 million): While our current storage is crowded and the need grows each year due to lifetime evidence retention requirements, this facility expansion has been postponed indefinitely.

- Shanklin Park Pool Replacement (\$12 million): Goshen's only public pool has reached the end of its usable life. This replacement would have provided affordable swimming lessons, water safety education, and recreation for families throughout our community. This project is postponed indefinitely.
- ADA Building Compliance (\$6 million): The renovation of our historic Annex Building to make it ADA-compliant has been suspended. Many city employees currently work in basement offices with no accessible alternative, and residents with mobility challenges face barriers accessing some city services.
- Staffing Reductions: We have suspended eight staff positions that the city council approved in 2024 to address growing service demands, including positions in IT, finance, community relations, and essential city services. Existing staff are absorbing these responsibilities.

Goshen's situation reflects a statewide challenge. SEA 1 's artificial caps on property tax growth come at a time when costs for materials, labor, and essential services continue rising. Tariffs on construction materials and competitive markets for public safety personnel make these challenges even more acute.

While property tax relief is an understandable goal, SEA 1 doesn't eliminate the tax burden, it shifts costs to income taxes while forcing cuts to the very services that make communities safe, accessible, and attractive for families and businesses.

We are not asking you to reverse your position, but we hope this information helps you understand the impact on your constituents. As you consider future legislation affecting municipal finance, we hope you will do so with these and other negative consequences in mind.

We remain committed to serving our community as effectively as possible within the constraints SEA 1 has created. However, we believe our residents deserve to understand what they are losing and why.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these impacts with you in person and to work together on solutions that maintain both fiscal responsibility and the essential services our communities need.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Mayor Gina M. Leichty City of Goshen



EXAMPLE: Letter to State Legislators

[Date]

The Honorable [Legislator Name] [Address]
[City, State ZIP]

Dear [Senator/Representative] [Last Name],

As we conclude the 2026 budget process, I am writing to share the impact that SEA-1 is having on the Town of South Whitley and the residents we both represent.

Our town of 1,818 residents is facing a significant budget loss. Our circuit breaker loss is over \$40,000, and we estimate this number will at least double to over \$80,000 by 2028 because of SEA-1. Another significant factor is that our county has only one city that qualifies for its own LIT funding. When the new law is fully implemented, the remaining three small towns, including South Whitley, will share the minimal percentage allotted for communities under 3,500 residents. For a community our size, this combination of factors will represent a significant loss to our ability to provide basic services.

We have made significant cuts across departments to maintain even a minimal cash reserve — the most significant of which has been to our police department. Because of the funding loss, the department has been reduced to the point where we will soon have no dedicated funding except what we can allocate from our general fund. Our officers now must rely on grants to fund:

- Annual training requirements
- New equipment when existing equipment expires
- Vehicle repairs
- K-9 program expenses
- Competitive salaries and raises to retain qualified officers

We are currently seeking grant writers to secure outside funding but even grant writing services are expensive — an added cost we would prefer to spend on the very services in jeopardy.

South Whitley's situation reflects the unique burden SEA-1 places on small, rural communities. While property tax relief may sound appealing, SEA-1 doesn't eliminate the tax burden — it shifts costs to income taxes while forcing cuts to essential services like law enforcement that keep our community safe, especially since the current income tax option leaves communities like ours behind.

As you consider future legislation affecting municipalities like South Whitley, we urge you to account for the unique challenges facing us — towns that lack the tax base, funding options, and resident capacity to absorb these losses.

Sincerely,
Alyssa Knepple
Clerk-Treasurer



EXAMPLE: Op-Ed

The Hidden Cost of Property Tax Reform: What Goshen is Losing

By Mayor Gina M. Leichty

Like many Hoosiers, I understand the appeal of property tax relief. Rising property values and tax bills create real hardship for families, seniors on fixed incomes, and small business owners. I believe that when Governor Braun promised property tax relief during the campaign, he was responding to legitimate concerns from constituents.

The promise was simple: reduce municipal income to provide relief to taxpayers. The reality is more complex. Senate Enrolled Act 1 doesn't eliminate the tax burden — it shifts costs to other taxpayers while forcing cuts to essential services that make our communities safe, accessible, and thriving.

As mayor of Goshen, I have a responsibility to show residents what we're losing in the process. In our community, police and fire together make up about 70% of our total budget. That means it is ultimately impossible to shield those services from reductions under SEA 1 when it is fully implemented in its current Form. Even if we eliminated every dollar from every other department, cuts to police and fire would still be unavoidable.

Since SEA 1's passage, Goshen has suspended \$33.6 million in critical projects and positions. These aren't luxury items from a wish list. They are investments in public safety, infrastructure, and community services that families expect and depend on.

For example, we've suspended construction of a \$12 million fire station to serve Goshen's rapidly growing south side. While our public safety professionals will continue to go above and beyond for our neighbors, this ultimately means that families in neighborhoods will continue waiting longer for emergency medical response. This is in addition to indefinitely postponing the rehabilitation of the

Shanklin Park Pool, delaying the construction of a needed police evidence storage building, and the reduction of eight staff members across various departments.

While we will rise to meet the letter and spirit of the law, here's the irony: the services we need to cut are the ones that make communities attractive to families and businesses. Good emergency response, safe recreation facilities, and accessible public buildings aren't luxuries — they're the foundation of community life.

When we cut these services, we make our communities less desirable places to live and work. Property values suffer, the tax base shrinks, and we enter a downward spiral where we have even less revenue to provide basic services.

To be clear, Goshen's situation isn't unique. Communities across Indiana are making similar impossible choices. Growing cities are hit hardest because our needs are expanding while our resources are artificially constrained. But smaller towns face the same dilemma, they just have fewer options.

Construction costs have soared due to inflation and tariffs on building materials. Public safety salaries must remain competitive to attract qualified officers and paramedics. Road salt, equipment, and utilities all cost more than they did even two years ago.

Yet our revenue growth is capped below these rising costs, creating a permanent squeeze on essential services.

The \$33.6 million we've cut represents years of careful planning to meet our community's urgent needs. Every project was developed with extensive community input and designed to address real challenges facing real families.

As we move forward, I hope state leaders will remember that behind every budget number is a local impact. The fire station isn't just a building, it's faster help when your child stops breathing. The pool isn't just recreation, it's where kids learn water safety and families create memories.

The question isn't whether we can afford these investments. It's whether we can afford to go without them.



EXAMPLE: Op–Ed

Small Towns Bear the Biggest Burden of Property Tax Reform

By Alyssa Knepple, Clerk–Treasurer, Town of South Whitley

Like many Hoosiers, I understand the appeal of property tax relief. Rising property values create real hardship for families, seniors on fixed incomes, and small business owners. I believe that the state legislature acted in good faith to reduce property taxes. The reality is more complex. Senate Enrolled Act 1 doesn't eliminate the tax burden — it shifts costs to income taxes in 2028 while forcing cuts to local revenues that fund essential services that keep our communities safe.

My community, the town of South Whitley, is home to a little more than 1,800 people. Because of SEA 1, small towns like ours face a structural disadvantage in how Local Income Tax funds are distributed. Our county has only one city that qualifies for its own LIT funding. The three remaining small towns will share just 0.4% allotted for communities under 3,500 residents. While larger communities have options to offset losses, we're left with almost nothing.

Most concerning, these changes will force South Whitley to systematically reduce our police department budget. Soon, we will have no dedicated funding except what we can squeeze from our general fund. Our officers now rely on grants to cover annual training requirements, equipment, vehicle repairs, K–9 expenses, and competitive salaries to prevent trained officers from leaving. We're hiring grant writers to chase outside funding, money we'd prefer to put back into our programs and people.

When we can't afford police training and equipment, when officers leave for better-paying departments, when response times suffer, we become less safe and less viable as a community. Small towns across Indiana face these impossible choices, but we're hit hardest because we have the fewest options. We don't have diverse revenue streams or wealthy tax bases to cushion the blow.

We shouldn't have to choose between affordable property taxes and functional police

departments. We deserve better than being collateral damage in property tax reform. I have urged our legislators to work hard this session on solutions that preserve their tax reform efforts without compromising communities like South Whitely. I urge you to do the same.

EXAMPLE



EXAMPLE: Letter to the Editor

New Property Tax Reform Misses the Mark

As a longtime Goshen resident and taxpayer, I supported the idea of property tax relief when it was proposed during the campaign. Like many families, we've struggled with rising property values and tax bills, especially on our fixed income.

Here's what I don't understand though: Goshen has to cut \$33.6 million in projects and positions because of the property tax legislation, but when income taxes are adopted to make up for the lost revenue, my overall tax liability won't go down. If the savings were substantial, maybe these sacrifices would be worth it. But the relief is likely to be minimal compared to what we're losing.

When state politicians promised property tax relief, I thought they meant finding ways to make government more efficient or targeting help to those who need it most. A fire station isn't a luxury. Teaching kids to swim isn't frivolous. Making buildings accessible isn't optional.

I still think property tax relief is important, especially for seniors and young families. But there has to be a smarter way to do it than compromising essential services.

Maybe the state could provide more funding for local services. Maybe we could target relief to those who need it most. Maybe we could find ways to make all governments more efficient without eliminating programs people actually use.

What I know is that this approach is going to hurt more than it helps. We're sacrificing our community's future for minimal savings. Our state legislators meant well, but this seems shortsighted. I hope they'll take a hard look at what's actually happening in communities and find a better path forward.

We shouldn't have to choose between affordable property taxes and safe, clean communities. Indiana can do better than that.

[Resident Name]
Goshen, Indiana



Social Media Messaging Templates

Below are examples of potential social media posts. The intention is NOT to find someone to write these words. The intention is to provide examples of how those affected in specific ways can tell their stories about the cuts and austerity measures happening at the local level.

Senior Citizen Perspective

Forty-two years ago, I was part of the committee that helped get Shanklin Park Pool built. We raised funds, attended countless meetings with the city, and fought for a place where every kid in Goshen could learn to swim safely.

Now I'm watching my 6-year-old grandson get excited about learning to swim there next summer, only to find out the pool replacement has been canceled because of the property tax legislation pushed through the statehouse earlier this year.

That old pool is literally falling apart. I see chunks of concrete in the shallow end where my grandson plays. The city was going to replace it in the 2026 budget, but it looks like the legislature killed that plan.

My generation built this pool because we believed every child deserves access to water safety, regardless of their family's income. Now where will my grandson learn to swim? The nearest public pool is 30 minutes away.

I thought property tax relief would help families, but losing the community pool we worked so hard to build doesn't feel like progress — it feels like we're going backwards.

Firefighter's Wife Post

My husband has been a Goshen paramedic for 8 years. The stress he's under right now is heartbreaking.

The new South Fire Station that was supposed to get underway next year? It's postponed. The 6 additional public safety personnel they were going to hire? Also, on hold.

Do you know what that means? My husband and his crew are covering areas that are too far away. When someone calls 911 in the growing south side neighborhoods, it takes longer to get there.

Property tax relief was supposed to help families, but what happens when YOUR family needs emergency help and we're understaffed and overstretched?

#PublicSafety #Goshen #SEA1Impact #FirefighterFamily

New Resident's Perspective

We just moved to Goshen's south side last year because it's a growing, family-friendly area. Now I'm learning that our emergency response times could suffer due to the property tax legislation that moved through the statehouse earlier this year, postponing the new station.

The fire station that was planned for our area, the one that would cut our emergency response time in half, has been postponed.

When we bought our house, the realtor talked about planned infrastructure improvements. The fire station was a selling point!

We should be able to do better. I hope the state legislature knows the impacts this is having on our community for the minimal amount I'm saving on my property tax bill!!

Renter's Perspective

I know as a renter I am not going to get the property tax relief the state passed earlier this year unless my landlord decides to pass it along by reducing my rent. But what makes it worse is that the city will have to adopt an income tax to make up for lost revenues from property taxes and eliminate the public safety income tax. I understand homeowners feel the pinch, but people like me can't carry the burden under this new system.



Public Forum and Council Talking Points

Introduction

For Town/City Council Meetings

"Before we begin tonight's agenda, I want to update the community on how Senate Enrolled Act 1 is affecting our city's budget and services. While we respect that our state representatives and senators believed they were making the right policy choice, we have a responsibility to show residents what these changes mean for the services they depend on."

For Public Forums

"Thank you for coming tonight. I know property taxes are a concern for many families, and that's exactly why this conversation is so important. SEA 1 promised tax relief, but I want to show you what we're actually losing in the process and why these cuts affect every family in our community."

Key Message Framework: The Three-Part Message

Use local examples to create a meaningful message using the following framework:

- **Acknowledge the Intent:** "We understand the goal of providing property tax relief to families and businesses."
- **Show the Reality:** "But the real-world impact forces impossible choices between essential services that residents depend on."
- **Focus on Impact:** "These aren't budget numbers — they're real cuts that affect your family's safety and quality of life."

Note: Text in orange denotes a stat which should be plugged in from your municipality.

Specific Talking Points by Examples

In this section Goshen's deferred priorities are used as the example. Please review and write examples from your community using local projects and concerns.

Fire Station Delay:

- "Our current firefighters and paramedics are doing heroic work, but they're stretched thin covering areas that are growing rapidly."
- "The South Fire Station isn't just a building — it's faster help when your child stops breathing or your house catches fire."
- "Response time standards exist because minutes can mean the difference between life and death."

Staffing Cuts:

- "We've halted plans to hire six firefighters/paramedics. That's not just budget saving; that's longer waits when you call 911."
- "Public safety is the most expensive city service because it requires 24/7 staffing and competitive salaries to attract qualified personnel."

Infrastructure Reality:

- "Construction costs have risen dramatically due to inflation and tariffs on building materials."
- "Public safety salaries must remain competitive — if we can't attract qualified officers, firefighters, and paramedics, everyone suffers."
- "These aren't choices we're making—they're constraints being imposed by artificial caps that don't account for real-world cost increases."

Handling Difficult Questions

"Why can't you just be more efficient?"

Response Framework:

- "We've been operating lean for years—this \$xx thousand/million goes well beyond efficiency improvements."
- "When you're eliminating [example from your community i.e. fire stations and swimming pools], you're past efficiency and into essential services."
- "We welcome suggestions for specific cuts, but remember that every dollar saved means a service someone depends on."

Note: Text in orange denotes a stat which should be plugged in from your municipality.

"Isn't this just political theater?"

Response Framework:

- "Governor Braun and our legislators fulfilled a campaign promise. We're not questioning their motives."
- "That said, we have a responsibility at all times, but especially during the annual budgeting process, to show residents the real-world impact of policy decisions."
- "These cuts are happening right now — they're not hypothetical or political talking points."

"Can't you find the money somewhere else?"

Response Framework:

- "Municipalities have limited revenue options — we would welcome the opportunity to talk about the combination of revenue streams that would work best for our community."
- "Property taxes fund local services. When that revenue is artificially capped below inflation, cuts are inevitable."
- "We're exploring alternatives, but there's no magic pot of money to replace **\$xx thousand/million** in lost revenue."

"Why didn't you plan better for this?"

Response Framework:

- "We began planning immediately when SEA 1 was proposed earlier this year—that's why we can show specific impacts."
- "Good fiscal management means being transparent about what can and cannot be provided within budget constraints."
- "These projects were carefully prioritized based on community needs. Cutting them isn't better planning. It's forced by revenue limitations."

Audience-Specific Approaches

For Families with Young Children

- Emphasize: Swimming lessons, playground maintenance, after-school programs, emergency response times

Note: Text in orange denotes a stat which should be plugged in from your municipality.

- Message: "Family safety programming and development opportunities could be minimized or eliminated as the impact of these changes materialize."

For Seniors

- Emphasize: Emergency response times, accessibility, fixed-income tax burden
- Message: "Longer ambulance response and inaccessible buildings affect seniors disproportionately."

For Business Owners

- Emphasize: Emergency services, infrastructure, community attractiveness
- Message: "Strong communities with good services attract customers and employees."

For New Residents

- Emphasize: Growth management, service capacity, long-term planning
- Message: "Growing communities need infrastructure investments—these cuts push problems into the Future."

Data Points to Emphasize

Financial Impact

- "SEA 1 Forces a **[\$XX] thousand/million** reduction in essential projects."
- "That's equivalent to **[X]%** of our annual budget."
- "We're not talking about wasteful spending — every cut affects services residents use."

Service Impact

- "Emergency response times will increase in underserved areas."
- "**Eight** Fewer **town/city** employees to serve a growing population."

Future Consequences

- "This is just the beginning. Because of the way that the legislation was written, municipalities will experience deeper cuts in 2026 and 2027."
- "Deferred maintenance will become more of an ongoing issue that we are planning to address now."

Note: Text in orange denotes a stat which should be plugged in from your municipality.

Visual Aids and Props

Material Examples:

- **Map showing fire station coverage gaps:** "This red area shows where response times will remain inadequate."
- **Photos of current amenity condition:** "This is why replacement isn't optional. At this point, it's a safety issue."
- **Before/after budget charts:** "Here's what we planned vs. what we can afford now."
- **Timeline of cuts:** "These impacts aren't theoretical. They're happening now."

Closing Statements

For Council Meetings

"We're committed to serving our community as effectively as possible within the constraints SEA 1 has created, but residents deserve to understand what they're losing and why. We'll continue working creatively to maintain essential services, but there are limits to what efficiency can accomplish when you're cutting **thousands/tens of millions** in critical infrastructure."

For Public Forums

"I know this is difficult information to hear. Nobody wants to cut **[insert amenity/service/project here]**. But transparency is the foundation of good government. You elect us to make tough decisions and to be honest about the tradeoffs. We're doing both. The question now is whether this is the future we want for our community."

For Hostile Audiences

"I understand the frustration. These are painful cuts that affect all of us. We're not asking you to like these decisions — we're asking you to understand that they're forced by revenue limitations, not poor planning or wasteful spending. If you have specific suggestions for alternative cuts or revenue sources, we're eager to hear them."

Note: Text in orange denotes a stat which should be plugged in from your municipality.