



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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What's Good About Levies?

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W. Kent Carper is the President of the Kanawha County Commission, where he has been a member for twenty-two years. He is responsible for setting the budget for the county, appropriating funds for the Prosecuting Attorney's office, the Sheriff's Department, the County and Circuit Clerk's offices and the Assessor's office.

In addition to his work on the County Commission, Carper is a former paramedic, former Chief of Police for the City of Charleston, as well as a former Kanawha County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney. He has also devoted half his life to the legal profession.

Carper is also an amateur radio enthusiast who serves as a volunteer ham radio operator in times of emergency.

What's good about levies? A lot. Some oppose county levies, falsely believing them to be wasteful spending or thinking they are the whim of an overreaching government. They are wrong. Levies are the people's most direct way of supporting their own public interests. Everyone benefits from better roads, water and sewer systems, public libraries and public safety. Simply put, levies improve quality of life. They are a referendum on the direction of the county.

One example of a beneficial tax is the Kanawha County Safety Levy, which passed with overwhelming support in May 2018. This levy has passed each time it has been presented to the people since 1973. It may be the single best bang for our buck at any level of government.

The current cost of the Safety Levy to the average Kanawha County household is 21 cents per day, or less than \$77 per year. These funds support 22 fire departments, ambulances that respond to 90 percent of calls within eight minutes and transport more than 200 patients every day, and buses that carry thousands of passengers. I challenge you to think of a better investment.

It can be an uphill battle to pass county levies in some states. In West Virginia, counties have the burden of needing to secure 60 percent approval, while school boards require only 50 percent to pass. Despite this double standard, the safety levy passed with an unprecedented 85 percent support, winning in each precinct.

The levy provides 56 percent of the budget for the City of Charleston's Fire Department ambulance unit, 32 percent of the Kanawha County Emergency Ambulance Authority budget and a whopping 64 percent of the Kanawha Valley Regional Transit Authority budget.

Some of you may think, "Commissioner, who rides the KRT bus?" More people than you would guess! We support 2.8 million passenger trips per year on 20 bus routes across Kanawha County. These customers support local attractions, businesses and area health care providers. They also travel to school and work, increasing our employment levels.

With an aging population and a health care crisis, our first responders show up to duty every





single day and receive over 50,000 calls per year. Dedicated women and men respond with the utmost speed and quality of care to each and every call. This is a vital service. What would we do without our fantastic fire, police and emergency ambulance services?

Economic development and public safety go together. People want to live, work and raise families in areas where they know they will be protected and looked out for. Just as West Virginians help neighbors in trouble, the Safety Levy looks out for people.

Without the amenities provided by county levies, who are we as a community? Lost bus services. Closed libraries. We would not be able to dispatch ambulances to rural areas. Longer response times for 911 calls. Higher ambulance fees. Reduced transportation opportunities for the disabled. There is no mistaking it, lives would be lost. This is not who we are as a county. We are better than that. This dystopian image demonstrates what our fate could become without the financial support of county levies.

The Kanawha County Safety Levy is a model levy for the state and the most direct way for the public to influence change. County levies are the only time the public has absolute oversight on government spending – imposing a tax on themselves, controlling it themselves.

The voter is a partner with the city or county, which is the exact opposite of taxation without representation. People are distrustful of government if local and state officials do not do their jobs to protect the people. If the government proves to the public they are not wasting money, the public will then vote to support initiatives like the Safety Levy. On the flipside, a warning to all elected officials in November: the public will punish when they see waste. ▽



The Kanawha County Safety Levy supports fire protection, emergency medical services and public transportation throughout the county.