

As mayor of the city of Garfield Heights, I am pleased to have the opportunity to address readers of the Neighborhood News in the paper's new Mayor's Column. I look forward to keeping residents informed through this important source of community news.

Right now what is weighing heavily on my thoughts is the proposed charter amendment that is on the ballot in November and the devastating effect Issue 54 will have on our city finances if voters change the charter. I honestly don't understand why anyone would want voters to hurt our city by asking them to eliminate a source of money we desperately need right now.

For the first time since 2009, the city's general fund is in the black and our short term financial outlook is good. This is because we have tightened our belts, reduced costs, cut jobs and asked our residents to pay a monthly fee to collect their garbage weekly. It is that essential revenue source, about \$1.5 million, that will be eliminated if voters approve Issue 54.

Ohio's Office of Budget and Management is overseeing the city's budget because of our past deficits and I recently received a letter from Financial Planning Commission Administrator Sharon Hanrahan who is very concerned about our city's financial health in the long term should we lose the rubbish fee. She said that if the ballot initiative succeeds and this revenue stream is lost, we would either have to find another source of revenue or be forced to cut services and staffing further.

This is the message I have been telling to all of the residents of our city. If we do not get enough NO votes on Issue 54, we will have to make cuts. I hope people understand that losing ANY sources of revenue would set the city back several steps and would have a disastrous effect on city finances.

This is not a threat, not blackmail, not something I am making up. It is a stark reality that we must have a balanced budget, so if we lose a source of revenue, we will have to make cuts. Deficit balances were why the city went into fiscal emergency and maintaining a balanced budget is the only way that the city will get out of fiscal emergency.

Look around this town. Our business partners believe in our community and its residents and are working to help us move forward. Marymount Hospital has expanded. OverDrive is building its world headquarters here. The Cuyahoga County Regional Library is constructing a new branch. And there are plenty of other positive things happening.

So, basically, it is up to Garfield Heights voters to make a decision. Do you want the city to move ahead or do you want it to fall? If you want us to move ahead, Vote NO on Issue 54.