

How Is The Town of Jackson Funded?

This is one in a series of articles.

Hindsight is 20-20. In 1973 no one knew so many people would find Jackson, Wyoming as desirable as they do today. No one imagined that a once sleepy valley, that had people snowed-in for many months each year, would become a Zoom Town with residents living here while working “in” Dallas, New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. In the 1970s, few would have predicted that in the next century residents of Jackson would make more income from investments than any other place in the country. This is the current reality in Jackson and Teton County though. Our community has changed quite a lot over the last fifty years, but the way the Town is funded has not.

In 1973, an election year, Mayor Ralph Gill let voters know that if they supported a 5th cent of sales tax, the Town of Jackson would stop levying property taxes on its residents. The 5th cent passed and has been a part of the revenue the Town receives ever since. Various Town Councils kept this agreement in place for nearly five decades, until this year, when Council voted to collect ½ of a mill of property tax. Compared to other entities receiving property tax in Teton County, this ½ mill will not bring the Town much funding. Yes, it generates real money, likely around \$250K, but it is a tiny percent compared to what other entities receive from property tax. Below is a list of property taxes for 2021, the most recent year of recorded collections, with the projected amount the Town will receive in 2022 at the bottom.

TETON COUNTY PROPERTY TAX MILL LEVIES		
	2021 MILL LEVY	2021 TAX COLLECTED
School District Levy (Mandatory)	25	\$58,294,279
WY State School Foundation	12	\$27,981,254
County General Fund (including library)	7.379	\$17,206,139
County School Fund (local)	6	\$13,990,627
Teton County Hospital Fund Levy	3	\$6,995,313
Weed & Pest Control District	1	\$2,331,771
TCSD #1 Recreation	0.25	\$1,865,417
Teton Conservation District	0.85	\$1,865,417
County Fire Protection Fund	0.5	\$749,088
School District Levy BOCES Region 5	0.2	\$466,354
School District Levy BOCES CWC	0.2	\$466,354
TCSD #1 Early Childhood Care & Education	0.1	\$233,177
Town of Jackson (projected)	0.5	\$250,000

It has been 47 years since the Town received property tax, when it could have been collecting up to 8 mills, which would have garnered nearly \$4 million for the Town in 2020 alone. As seen above, the funds the Town has done without would have amounted to many millions of dollars

to reinvest in infrastructure and services to meet our community's needs. The agreement made in 1973 made sense to the community members that made it. It made enough sense that Town Councils maintained it by not voting for property tax for another forty-plus years. It made sense when additional funding was not necessary, but times have changed both incrementally and, more recently, exponentially. Structurally, the Town's revenue picture is not set up for success. The Town simply cannot continue to provide all the services residents currently receive for the long-term without additional revenue. The Town simply cannot continue to provide all the services residents currently receive without additional revenue in the long-term.

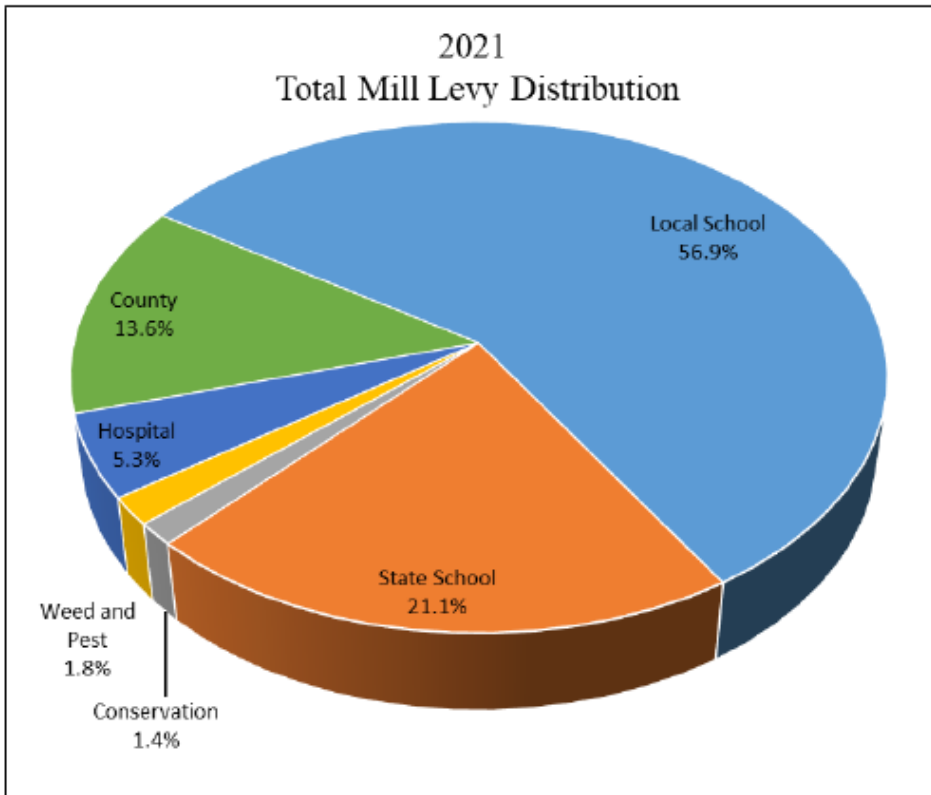
The Town has taken pride in not collecting property tax for all these years, making do in other ways, stretching every dollar, and running a lean organization that has been able to meet most of our community's needs with ingenuity and grit. And, as the popularity of the Town of Jackson and its reputation as a destination has grown, so have the needs that the Town addresses every day.

Today, the Town treats and supplies more water, manages more storm drains and water pipes, maintains more public restrooms, parking lots, sidewalks, and roads, and answers more calls for service for Firefighters and Police than ever before. Our community has grown in population size, visitations, and in sophistication in terms of the standards of service residents consider necessary for everyday life. Core services, things people depend on every day, have increased between 50 to 70 percent in the last twenty years. Here are specific numbers.

- Calls for service for Fire/EMS have risen 69% since 2010
- The Town manages 50% more water and storm drainpipes than it did in 2000
- The Town maintains 10 more public parking lots and 3 more restrooms than in 2000
- The number of roads the Town manages has increased by nearly 30% since 2000
- Today, the Town's sewer facility is twice the size it was in 2000

Considering these realities, it is amazing the Town of Jackson has managed to continue providing the services it does without increasing its revenue pie. The Town has had the same funding structure for the last 50 years. The structure needs to be updated.

The graph below highlights where the largest chunks of property taxes currently go in Teton County. The Town of Jackson's ½ mill will be significantly smaller than the thinnest slice in this pie chart.



The Town is a prudent organization that is currently on solid financial footing, but this may not continue to be possible without additional recurring revenue. No one at the Town claims to have figured out the answer to our revenue challenges. What we know is that we need an answer. How should the Town be funded? Should Council consider additional sales tax, county-wide or in Town only? Should Council work to increase the lodging tax, or assess additional property tax? Town Council is currently discussing these questions and is working to set a strategic funding strategy for the Town to be able to continue to meet our community's needs. What do *you* think? If you are interested in listening to Town Council's discussion about this topic, tune-in to Council's Workshop on Monday, December 20 starting at 1:30pm.

-The Town of Jackson

