NEBRASKA TAXPAYERS FOR FREEDOM COMMENTS ON THE PAPIO NRD FY 2025-2026 BUDGET, AUG. 14, 2025.

Good afternoon. Doug Kagan, representing NE Taxpayers for Freedom. This NRD draft bases on an estimated valuation increase of 4%, which is a low estimate. The residential real estate market in Douglas Co. is now described as a "hot market," and the Douglas Co. Assessor, examining 65% of NRD valuation territory, estimates valuations up by 5.8%. This premise means that the proposed tax rate, pegged to valuations, will cause higher taxes for residents in Douglas Co., higher than other counties in the NRD. Homeowners will see an average 10% tax hike. Furthermore, the NRD used only 27.77% of its FY 2025 appropriations for flood control and only 34.88% for erosion control, yet you want $13,789,441 more and $5,444,139 more respectively in FY 2026. The NRD carried over $61.4 million in funds appropriated but not spent and expects to carry over $31.1 million in FY 2026, both exorbitant amounts. Overbudgeted items abound, e.g., contract work for the MoPac Trail. NRD cost shares are paying for extraneous expenditures: A Bennington Disc Golf Course $19,119. These expenditures do not fall within NRD basic core responsibilities. The NRD simply assumes financial responsibility for too many projects. Employee health insurance costs decreased, yet the next year appropriation increases. There are over $1 million in contributions and reimbursements for Platte River obstruction removal but no scheduled appropriations. Because so many appropriations carried over from the previous fiscal year, the NRD should not have appropriated the funds in the previous fiscal year. The board should appropriate monies only in the year those dollars spent (accrual accounting which most taxing authorities use). The NRD is hoarding $500,000 in interest, monies that, with other budget cuts, could lower the tax levy. Below, we urge the board to utilize the following budget suggestions:

NTF SUGGESTIONS:

- Decrease number of memberships in outside organizations and service awards.
- Decease staff travel; utilize zoom.
- End contribution to Keep Omaha Beautiful (Stream Cleanup/Trees), saving $ 27,000. Decrease contributions to other outside organizations.
- End pollinator habitat, saving $10,000.
- End recycling projects, saving $ 40,000 (p. 5).
- Appropriations to the Information & Education Program would double. The NRD should eliminate this entire expenditure of $260,500, e.g., Earth Day, Neb. Broadcaster, Midlands Community Foundation, Green Bellevue, National Wild Turkey Federation, Friends of Lewis & Clark. Also terminate these educational assistance programs: Grants/Scholarships, Pheasants Forever, and conference support, saving $15,000.
- Eliminate special education events, saving $28,000 (p. 7).
- End General Education Programs, e.g., education trees, education materials, animal care supplies, GPS units, saving $60,000 (p. 7).
- End appropriations for exhibits and displays, publications and brochures, and public information campaigns, saving thousands (p. 6).
- Eliminate the Conservation Assistance Program, saving $500,000 (p. 15).
- Spell out abbreviated terms to explain projects, etc.
- Because of a decrease in federal and state grant monies, the NRD should sharpen its budget-cutting knife (p. 24).
- End partnership projects such as with the Oak Leaf Subdivision, saving $500,000.