

The “City of Battlement Mesa!”

Several of our residents have told me that, the “City of Battlement Mesa” has a “nice” ring to it. But could it really happen?

As discussed in my August / September article, at our request, Garfield County hired BBC Research & Consulting to conduct a “Battlement Mesa Incorporation Financial Feasibility Analysis.” The final report was released on January 7, 2011. What does it say?

First, the positive news: The 57 page report appears to be a well-researched and well-written report. And, now, the not so positive news: It seems unlikely that Battlement Mesa will be holding a mayor and city council election any time soon. According to the report, operating our community as the “City of Battlement Mesa” would be dramatically more expensive to our residents than operating under our current HOA format.

I need to explain what is meant by “dramatically more expensive.” In truth, operating Battlement Mesa as an incorporated city would be somewhat more expensive than operating as a homeowners association but the overall cost isn’t dramatically more. What makes it more expensive is the adjustment of the mix between what Battlement Mesa residents pay and what Garfield County pays. The issue is complex but as I explained in my earlier article on the subject, “Battlement Mesa is a very large financial drain on Garfield County. We’re sort of like their thirty-five year old son that is still living at home and not contributing to the household expenses.

According to the report; “After incorporation, Garfield County would continue to collect the same sales and property taxes from Battlement Mesa residents. The county would transfer to the new municipality vehicle use tax revenue from automobile sales, certain planning and building permit revenues and some shared state revenue.” The report continues with, “Most importantly, the county would lose responsibility for providing street maintenance, snowplowing and police protection services, as well as the administration of land use and building controls.” The final paragraph of the report states, “The above analysis demonstrates that the county currently spends roughly \$1.2 million a year in Battlement Mesa for direct services of snowplowing, police services and road maintenance.”

Guess who has to make up the \$1.2 million a year that Garfield County would save if Battlement Mesa incorporated? That’s right, we would.

Some people believe that the revenues that we would receive, which now go to the county, could fund our increased portion of the overall operating cost. BBC Research & Consulting concluded otherwise. The Feasibility Analysis states, “Contrary to common perception, incorporation does not divert substantial amounts of existing tax revenues to the new community. New cities and towns must raise new revenues by way of new fees, charges and taxes. In this instance, a new municipality of Battlement Mesa would get a share of county sales tax and road and bridge fund redistributions; some state highway users tax fund receipts; a share of state cigarette tax funds; and a share of state conservation trust fund revenues. ...and the new municipality would get a share of severance tax receipts, which are distributed to cities, towns, counties and certain districts...roughly \$275 per (energy worker) household, but they are also uncertain and have varied widely in recent years.” Further, the report explains that these funds have been and continue to be pursued as a means of funding gaps in the state’s budget.

BBC Research believes that, under incorporation, Battlement Mesa “would spend \$2.0 million dollars a year in order to replicate current county sheriff protection and road maintenance services, as well as develop required new municipal services.” In order to provide the necessary funding, Battlement Mesa could implement “a new 3.0 percent sales tax and a new 8-mill property tax” but would still “fall short...by about \$300,000.”

So where does this leave us? Well, we could put this study on a shelf and forget about incorporation or we could continue to explore other alternatives to our present form of government and to pursue initiatives that would enable us to eventually incorporate, while taking steps to improve the functionality of our HOA style of government. I am convinced that putting the study on a shelf and doing nothing isn't a good option. Although Battlement Mesa's future strategy is undecided, I am certain that we can't keep doing the same thing and expect to get a different result and that though our collective wisdom and unified efforts Battlement Mesa will prosper. Unfortunately, I am also equally convinced that the fragmentation that exists in our community combined with a "but we've always done it like that" attitude is not going to lead us to the "promised land."

To read the entire report, go to www.BattlementMesaColorado.com then to Documents.