

Urban renewal will mean higher taxes, unlimited government in Shoshone County

By **Erik Makrush**/Idaho Freedom Foundation

On May 21, Shoshone County voters will be asked to create an urban renewal agency. Voters are told that doing so will not raise taxes. This is simply not accurate. Idaho Freedom Foundation has studied urban renewal throughout Idaho, and in no instance has urban renewal been used without some impact to taxpayers. Urban renewal diverts taxpayer money to projects for a cost, and that cost is always borne by someone, usually through higher levies to service either debt or structures authorized by urban renewal districts. County commissioners have said that their only intent is to reinvigorate mining by fixing Big Creek Road. This is hardly an "urban" corridor, which should raise red flags for voters. And for the property owners of on Big Creek, don't be surprised what comes next: The county will re-assess your home, determine it is worth more because of the new road, and that increase in valuation will be used to pay back the debt associated with the road project.

And indeed, just because the road is built doesn't mean it will translate into additional mining activity. It is quite possible the county will end up with a nice, improved road but little economic activity to show for it. That means taxpayers will be on the hook for higher taxes and they will get nothing in return.

But wait, there's more: Once an urban renewal agency is created by a vote of the people, it remain in place forever. Yes, Big Creek Road is the only project discussed today. But what's next? A new jail? Courthouse? School buildings? We have seen this before in other parts of the state. Because voters need to approve bonds, urban renewal is a handy way to bypass voters on all projects going forward. You will never again be asked to approve anything. Yet your taxes will go up, for items you would have never imagined endorsing, all in the name of economic development.