

# Irrigation district taxes aren't optional

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The news that properties with an assessed value of \$350,000 could be sold at auction for as little as \$401.25 has drawn its fair share of interest. The Press-Tribune received several phone calls from people asking where they could learn more about such auctions.

How is it possible such bargains could be available? Because the property owners failed to pay their irrigation taxes for the last three years.

Idaho law requires irrigation districts — in this case, the Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District — to assess the land inside its boundaries to help pay the costs to operate and maintain canals, laterals, drains and dams in its water delivery system. State law requires these taxes be paid, just like it does property taxes.

If the irrigation assessments aren't paid, state law requires the districts to file a lien on the property. After three years of unpaid bills, the law directs the irrigation district treasurer to issue a tax deed to the property to the district.

Earlier this month, 11 such properties were at risk of being auctioned off under such circumstances. Two actually were. It's very unfortunate that someone could lose valuable property this way, and perhaps it's another unpleasant reminder of the economy we're all trying to navigate through.

Nonetheless, irrigation district taxes have to be paid. That's just the way it is, and it's the way it has been for a long time.

The Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District was formed in 1904 — more than a century ago — to provide a vital necessity to a burgeoning agricultural industry. We live in a dry, arid climate, so without irrigation, the Treasure Valley never could have become what it is.

There are some property owners who are required to pay irrigation taxes but get no water in return. The theory is that they see many benefits from living in an area with a thriving agricultural community, and since they live on that land, they should also pay the tax.

It may seem unfair, but most of us pay all kinds of taxes and fees for things we don't receive personally, but benefit from indirectly. Single people with no children pay property taxes for schools. Our property taxes help maintain cemeteries, regardless of whether we personally know anyone buried in them. We pay to maintain fire districts, whether or not our houses catch on fire.

It can be easy to take for granted the many advantages of living here that we all enjoy. But those advantages cost money to be maintained. It's not fun paying those bills, but we must. It's the law.