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Fairness in local government means the same rules apply to everyone who benefits from city services. Annexation and utility franchise fees are not technical details; they determine whether businesses that rely on city infrastructure contribute fairly to the police, fire protection, emergency response, and utilities that make those operations possible.

In Muskogee, annexation of the John T. Griffin Industrial Park has been part of the City's long-range planning for more than a decade, well before an out-of-state company called Polaris Technologies began operations in the area. They didn't like the annexation, yet they wanted to use Muskogee City's services. City planning documents and public statements show that bringing the industrial park into the City was always contemplated to ensure large industrial users benefiting from city-proximate infrastructure would contribute equally to public services.¹² The annexation effort was not created for Polaris, nor was it a sudden change in policy.

Despite this long-standing plan, public opposition to annexation was led by Daniel Chepkas, a paid political lobbyist representing Polaris, and supported by Councilwoman Jaime Stout. The annexation passed 7 to 1 with the only vote going against it was Councilwoman Jaime Stout. During public debate, residents were warned that annexation would harm the company and cost jobs.³⁴ Those claims have not borne out. Polaris remains operating, and the City is now collecting substantial monthly franchise-fee revenue that directly supports police, fire, and other essential services.⁵ The total collection has been about \$400,000 per month for the City of Muskogee.

This is why the issue is fundamentally about fairness. Franchise fees are a long-established funding mechanism in Muskogee, applied broadly within city limits to help pay for public safety and infrastructure.⁶ Other similar companies in size, or even substantially larger like Google, have no problem paying the local community franchise fee. When large, high-demand utility users seek to avoid annexation or exemptions from these fees, the cost does not disappear — it shifts to residents and small businesses, or it results in fewer resources for police officers, firefighters, and emergency response.

Allowing carve-outs for powerful interests undermines a system Muskogee has relied on for decades. Every dollar not collected from major industrial users is a dollar unavailable for staffing police patrols, maintaining fire protection capacity, or keeping response times low. This is not an abstract policy dispute; it directly affects public safety and the City's ability to protect its citizens.

This issue is not anti-business. Muskogee welcomes growth and investment, but growth must occur on equal terms. When companies choose to locate in an industrial park that has long been planned for annexation, fairness requires that they play by the same rules as everyone else. Efforts to use political pressure or litigation to avoid those obligations put public services at risk and undermine trust in local government.

Sources & References

1. City of Muskogee long-range planning materials referencing future annexation of the John T. Griffin Industrial Park (pre-dating Polaris operations).

2. Oklahoma Statutes, Title 11 (Municipal Government), authorizing annexation and municipal service plans.
3. *Muskogee Phoenix*, reporting on City Council annexation votes and public statements opposing annexation.
4. *Muskogee Phoenix*, coverage identifying Daniel Chepkauskas as a representative/lobbyist for Polaris during annexation proceedings.
5. City of Muskogee public statements and council records reflecting franchise-fee collections following annexation.
6. City of Muskogee Code of Ordinances and historical budget documents identifying franchise fees as a long-standing revenue source supporting police, fire, and general operations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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