

Greetings – and next steps in new beginnings!

Mayor & Council's 7-0 vote in support of the development agreement with one of the nation's top developers of convention hotels. Design is complete. Now it's time for the technical side of schematics, permits, determining the gross maximum price, and all, as well as defining which of the funding options available to us is best for our community.

But it's time to celebrate ... and those celebrations will begin this fall with groundbreaking for the actual beginning of the project: a new entrance on the east side of the Convention Center, which is the precursor to our new 525 room Sheraton flagship hotel. You see, the new hotel will be located right where the main entrance to the TCC is now located on the west side, so before the hotel can begin, a new entryway must be in place ... and I understand it is spectacular! I haven't seen the drawing yet, but I'll share them when I can.

Budget steps

Last night I presented one possible approach for budget cuts and possible revenue generation to help us balance the budget. These are ideas I'd been developing for a few months. I put them out on the table for full discussion at next week's Study Session.

It's an agonizing process! And it's far from over, but here's what I've figured out: If I do my job right the next several weeks ... if I carefully examine and weigh each and every decision confronting us in this budget cycle and make every decision based not on ideology, but on what I sincerely believe is in the best interest of this community as a whole in these very difficult financial times ... if I do that to the very best of my ability, as I intend to, I will probably tick off virtually every segment of our community in one way or another, because there are no easy solutions. There are no pat answers. And there are no decisions that don't in some way harm one part of our community or another.

The bottom line, though, is we must achieve the best possible balance in making things as right as possible in the worst of all possible financial

situations.

Priority must go to our core City services: Public Safety, Transportation, Parks, Water and Environmental Services. But we must provide more than just core services to retain the arts, culture and sense of community that makes us so special. And we must do everything we can to protect those who might otherwise fall through the cracks.

A few months ago, Mayor & Council approved funding for Crisis Services provided by agencies that receive support through the competitive Human Services process. We defined Crisis Services as food, shelter, domestic violence, and sexual assault services.

And the Human Services Planning Committee provided a recommendation of how to approach funding for the other programs on our lengthy list. The resulting Human Services Planning Committee Safety Net Support Plan for 2010 reaffirmed the Mayor & Council's decision that Crisis Services must be our #1 priority for funding. And they made specific recommendations for funding for the dozens of other programs on the list. While some of their recommended cuts are difficult for me because of my respect and/or affection for particular nonprofits in our community, I believe their recommendations are based on their expertise and their nonbiased approach. I will support their recommendations without lobbying for my 'pet programs'.

Then there's the Renters' Tax. I hate the idea. It is regressive, hitting some people already hurt badly by this recession. I could not support the first recommendation at 2%; that figure is now 1%, but I am still not comfortable with that. But saying 'no' to the Renters' tax leaves a \$10-million hole in the budget, so I have proposed a few other revenue source possibilities, which the City Attorney is exploring. A few other colleagues have come up with other ideas, which I applaud. I believe it is simply irresponsible to say 'no' to one source of funds without trying to find another ... or commensurate cuts ... to help us achieve a balanced budget.

So, for now, that's where we stand! Not a fun place to be right now, but together we will come up with a balanced budget in a timely fashion. And let us hope that in a few years when the Convention Center Hotel is open and the

Convention Center expanded, when the streetcar is running across a new bridge to the West Side and more new restaurants and offices open and our economy is buzzing along again, when all that happens ... and it will ... budget decisions will be far easier than this year's cycle ... or next. We will get to that point. Really!

I thank you for your thoughts and ideas. Many of you have written, and there have been some great concepts proposed! I am exploring several of them.

As always, please do stay in touch.

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