



Second February Mayor's Report - Mayor Tom Hoechst

February 22 2012 4:06 PM

While most of us think of a budget as an itemized document of income and expenses, a budget also outlines a plan for the future and showcases priorities.

Every year, as a new budget cycle rolls around, City leaders assess and ask questions about the previous years. These questions include, “What went right, what went wrong, did we achieve our goals, and how much should we invest in equipment and infrastructure?”

Most governmental bodies, at all levels, are walking a tightrope financially and no margin for error exists. Many governing bodies have responded to their financial situations by across the board cuts. I believe we have been smarter and have taken a fairer approach to our citizens and employees. As a City, we have prioritized and become more efficient while pursuing new avenues of accomplishing our goals.

Because there are limited funds, it is imperative that dollars are allocated responsibly. In these tough financial times, it is more important than ever to avoid knee jerk reactions. Fiscal restraint and efficiency are priorities. I continually track performance and results so that department heads and other elected officials know what is working and what needs improvement. We have survived three of the toughest years in our history financially, yet we continue to grow economically while stabilizing our finances.

When looking at the budgets submitted from department heads, I appreciate their aggression and forward thinking. However, as the executive officer, I make tough decisions based on mathematics and priority. I have encouraged innovation by creating new ways of doing business while reducing overall operating cost and my department heads have responded. Nothing makes me cringe more than to hear someone say, “Well

that's the way we've always done it." The City cannot afford that type of thinking during these economic times. The City's leaders stay on top of the situation by tracking results, but what works today may not work tomorrow.

Public employee benefit packages are a tremendous strain on the overall budget. Pensions and healthcare benefits for both employees and retired employees are ticking time bombs which have to be addressed sooner rather than later. Unfortunately these items are controlled by the Illinois State Constitution and only our leaders in Springfield can make the necessary changes needed. While immediate change is needed, make no mistake, 99% of these employees are hardworking, loyal, and caring. These are turbulent financial times and often public sector employees are used as scapegoats for certain politicians and media outlets. I continue to push for changes which result in financial solvency for our cities, fairness for our employees, and ensuring a solid foundation for the future. Changes are inevitable for financial survival in both the state and city form of government.

Upon becoming Mayor, and as a candidate, I had a vision and long term plan for stability and economic growth for our City. With the cooperation of the Aldermen, City Treasurer, City Clerk, and department heads, that vision is becoming a reality. Please keep in mind that the other elected officials do not answer to me, but directly to you, the residents. The cooperation of these elected officials is outstanding and an imperative that leads to effectiveness, efficiency, and a cohesive unit working together with the same objectives.

The buzz word three years ago was "change." The City's leadership has accomplished that change. We changed spending habits such as, payroll and associated cost, reduced workmen's compensation by having monthly training and safety meetings, became leaner and greener, and constantly adapted to meet the new daily challenges. You have my continued commitment as this budget process unfolds to be frugal, responsible, and to spend your tax dollars in the most efficient and prudent way possible.