

NORTHEAST NEWS

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Budget Not Set in Stone

■ Councilman Nash holds second session to get citizens ready for March 5 budget hearing

Saturday afternoon, Councilman Troy Nash held a second "It's Your Money" forum for Kansas City residents concerned about the 2003-2004 budget. The gymnasium of the Gregg Community Center on East 17th Terrace was not as crowded as during the first forum, but attracted about 50 community leaders, residents and even candidates for yesterday's municipal primary election. Of the approximately \$80 million of the city's budget that is actually flexible - that is, not already mandated by the state, by city ordinances or designated to support Water Services, Aviation, and the police and fire departments - about \$58 million is "not there." The city's total spending is \$27 million short of a billion dollars.

"In the coming years," Nash explained, "you're going to see less of everything."

City Budget Analyst Troy Schulte was once again on hand to walk participants through a slide presentation detailing the cause and nature of the city's \$58 million projected budget shortfall.

"This isn't a good budget by any stretch of the imagination," Schulte said before listing the ways the proposed budget would close the \$58 million imbalance. Almost nine million dollars is slated to come out of the so-called "rainy day fund," saving 300 jobs but reducing the city's emergency fund balance to practically nothing. "We would have about two weeks' worth of operating funds," Schulte said. The city would also stop building the fund by the usual million dollars per year.

About another nine million dollars would be "swept" through 301 city employees who have opted to accept an early

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"If you removed the date, you might think it's the same system proposed today," said Councilman Troy Nash about the 1971 letter the City of Kansas City sent to its residents after the Earnings Tax was approved to fund trash pick-up.

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retirement package. Four million dollars would be cut from equipment replacement funds, but the largest cuts are slated for programs and deferred maintenance, \$12.5 million and \$15.4 million, respectively.

Despite these cuts, Schulte said, the city was showing a commitment to public safety and infrastructure. Capital improvements represent 30 percent of the entire budget, and the 20 additional police officers and 36 new fire fighters were not cut out. As for basic services like street and park maintenance and solid waste management, Schulte said the budget tried to hold the line on current delivery, but that programs would be scaled back. In the case of residential trash pick-up, for example, the 2003-2004 proposed budget "tried to maintain basic service," Schulte said. However, beyond minimal trash pick-up, Environmental Management programs like Clean Sweep, neighborhood large trash container rental, recycling drop-off centers and education programs were virtually eliminated.

"Basically, the city would only be picking up trash and filling up landfills," said Councilman Jim Rowland at an earlier forum where he and the mayor unveiled the controversial "RecycleFIRST" program to try to address the proposed service cuts. The program

would ration residents' free trash pickup to 120 units per year but provide unlimited curbside recycling after an initial \$10 sign-up fee.

After Schulte's presentation Saturday, Nash answered questions from the audience, gathering information about what his constituents want.

"When we adopt this thing and I cast my vote," Nash said, "I want to make sure I did everything I could to represent you."

Nash said he hoped people would show up at City Hall for the March fifth public budget hearing.

"It's arguably the most important meeting you can attend," Nash said. "These community meetings should lead up to your going down there and voicing your opinion and offering amendments. Some are not going to like seeing you show up and challenging them as leaders."

Nash said he had some amendment of his own to offer regarding the 2003-2004 budget as prepared by the city manager.

The public budget hearing is scheduled for March 5 at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers, the 26th floor of City Hall at 414 E. 12 St. Secondary hearings are also held during upcoming Budget and Finance Committee meetings before the final 2003-2004 budget is voted on and adopted March 27.

"Contrary to popular belief, there is still time to make changes in the budget."

**Troy Nash
Councilman-at-Large
Third District**



January, 2003