

Barnes should surprise her critics by pushing her agenda with council, public

Mayor Kay Barnes is going to deliver another mostly upbeat State of the City speech today. An unofficial preview:



Yael T. ABOUHALKAH
The budget is troubled but our future is bright! Downtown is coming back! City Hall is getting more efficient! The new City Council will work together in your best interests! Ah, but excitedly what should city leaders do in the next year to build a better Kansas City?

Kay Barnes: Kansas Citians need more passion and less hemming and hawing from their mayor.

Barnes must move confidently with a clear sense of purpose to accomplish several high priorities — a new arena downtown, better basic services, private management at Kemper Arena.

That would surprise her critics and please most taxpayers. However, Barnes' agenda quickly will become irrelevant if she fails to personally push it with council members. Her priorities will fall by the wayside.

For example, Barnes must keep pounding away at City Hall bureaucracy with her Service First program. It has helped improve how the city whisks abandoned cars off the streets and enforces housing code inspections. Barnes said this week that the

program would continue. But she was unsure exactly how. She needs to resolve that question soon. Service First would die quickly without a passionate champion.

Wayne Cauthen: The new city manager will set the tone for how local government everyday serves hundreds of thousands of people who live and work in Kansas City.

How will Cauthen — who had just one boss as the chief of staff for Denver's mayor — handle reporting to not just the mayor but to 12 council members who also are his bosses?

Cauthen should not just listen to Barnes and a few of her council supporters. Instead, he needs to solicit wider views that include those in the business community and out in neighborhoods across the city.

With the eyes of a new comer, Cauthen also should be taking critical looks at the beleaguered city budget.

Soon, he should recommend some services for extinction. That

would free up money for services he considers more essential to residents.



Finally, Cauthen must move rapidly to place qualified managers in dozens of high-level government jobs, left empty because of the city's early retirement plan.



Jim Rowland: Suddenly, the man who used to argue with Barnes publicly, demand more accountability from bureaucrats and pontificate about how to spend public funds will play a top role in shaping the next \$1 billion city budget.

Rowland will be a good chairman of the Budget and Audit Committee if he talks less about economic theories and more about concrete and effective ways to alter the budget to serve taxpayers better.

Troy Nash: As a glib first-term council member, Nash did not have a big policy-making role. That will change as Nash becomes chairman of the Plans, Zoning and Economic Development Committee.

Development lawyers and corporations seeking tax breaks will covet more of his attention.

Meanwhile, neighborhood residents who often oppose or question these developments will prod Nash to be fair with them.

ed in development matters. **Becky Nace:** Barnes took the low road and refused to give this popular second-term council member any powerful committee assignment.

But so what? Nace still will bring up salient points about city policies. As long as she doesn't try to personally vilify the mayor, Nace can have a positive effect on how to use public funds.

That will be especially true if potential council allies such as Bonnie Sue Cooper, Deb Hermann and Jim Glover agree with and help champion Nace's positions on some issues.

Mark Funkhouser: Council members need the experienced city auditor to continue dissecting government programs on behalf of residents.

Funkhouser wanted but didn't get the city manager's job. Based on his track record, though, he is professional enough to know his job is to praise Cauthen and his staff when they deserve it.

Funkhouser should criticize them and recommend ways to improve programs when that's necessary, too.

Barnes and others will say plenty of positive words about Kansas City's future at today's inauguration festivities. Next they have to tackle the hard work that will make those words ring true for taxpayers.



Kansas City's future will depend on the interaction of Mayor Kay Barnes (at right) and other city leaders. Clockwise from bottom left are City Manager Wayne Cauthen; City Council members Jim Rowland, Troy Nash and Becky Nace; and City Auditor Mark Funkhouser.

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