

News from Cam Gordon

Council Member, Second Ward

December 2010

<http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/council/ward2/>

2011 Budget. On December 13, the City Council approved the 2011 Budget. This year's budget is the most difficult I have experienced since taking office. One concern is that many, if not all, property owners have seen significant property tax increases over 2010. Several factors play roles in this year's increase in property taxes including a decline in the overall tax base; a shift in the burden of property taxes from commercial and industrial properties onto residential properties; increased obligations to closed pension funds; decreases in Local Government Aid; and the recertification of Tax Increment Financing Districts. Please see my blog for more of my thoughts on the levy.

When the Council approved the budget Monday, they did so after approving a set of amendments which cut an additional \$6.1 million from the Mayor's original proposal. The cuts will lower the City's property-tax levy increase from the approved 7.5% to 4.7%. Unfortunately, at a 4.7% levy increase, the property-tax bill for the median Ward 2 area homeowner will only be about \$30-\$50 smaller than it would have been under the 7.5% levy increase reflected in the Truth in Taxation statements mailed in November.

The \$6.1 million includes: a \$1 million dollar reduction to our self-insurance fund; a \$1.1 million dollar reduction in Target Center maintenance and upgrades; a \$1.4 million dollar reduction to the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority; a \$2 million reduction in the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board budget; a \$400,000 reduction to the proposed Pension Management Plan; and a \$250,000 reduction in funding for City Hall. These cuts were in addition to cuts this year and in past years that resulted in the City's proposed budget for 2011 being **7% smaller** than the City's budget in 2001. The City will have close to 80 fewer full-time employees in 2011 than 2010 and 400 fewer than it did in 2001.

Looking into future years the Council approved a freezing City wages for two years over the next three years. It also passed another \$23 million in cuts that will be triggered in February if the governor's recommended State budget includes less in Local Government Aid for Minneapolis than the \$87.5 million in aid that the State certified earlier this year.

I was supportive of many, if not all, of these ideas. One other idea, however, I strongly opposed was the amendment that makes dramatic changes to the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) and directs staff to freeze millions of already allocated NRP Phase 2 dollars, while the City seeks to move some or all of that money to the new Neighborhood and Community Relations Department. This will allow the City to cut in half the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district that funds neighborhood organization work and Target Center debt by using funds from the old NRP fund to pay for the neighborhood portion.

Primarily because of this, for the first time, I voted against a City budget. I could not in good conscience vote for a budget that reneges on the commitments the Council unanimously made to our partners in neighborhoods this past June. I believe that this decision will fundamentally damage both the capacity of neighborhoods to serve Minneapolis residents and their capacity to collaborate with the City.

And we should be clear about one important fact: the action to freeze Phase II dollars has no impact whatsoever on the **2011** budget, the **only** action the Council was required to make this December. Rather, this decision presupposes that the cuts in the **2012** budget will come from neighborhoods. Rather than taking the time to explore all options and work with our neighborhood partners, the Council decided on these cuts to neighborhoods this December.

City of Minneapolis leaders decry the decisions at the State level to renege on commitments made to local governments through Local Government Aid. Yet, when budget times get difficult, the Council majority makes clear that it will break its promises to neighborhoods just as readily as the state government has broken its promises to counties and cities.

The impact of the NRP Phase II funding freeze to the Ward 2 neighborhood is substantial. My preliminary research indicates that the Longfellow neighborhood will potentially lose \$933,000; Cedar Riverside - \$352,289, Prospect Park - \$84,225, Seward - \$44,639, Southeast Como - \$122,142 and the University \$50,000 in allocated Phase II dollars. City-wide, the neighborhoods most impacted by the freeze in Phase II dollars are among the poorest in Minneapolis.

I want to be clear that I am strongly in favor of cutting property taxes. But I believe that there are other, less sustainable and less worthwhile decisions that the City has made in the past that should have been reviewed and reconsidered before decided to withhold revitalization funding from neighborhoods. I advocate doing a more complete and thoughtful study to identify budget cuts that can be made to major expenses that offer little or no direct benefit to the residents of Minneapolis.

It was especially disheartening that the Council majority was unwilling to approve a motion made by Council Member Lilligren that I helped draft that would have directed our Finance Department to identify options for property tax relief for the years 2012 and 2013 and report to back with a plan for providing at least \$5.5 million dollars in tax relief each year. The motion called for a plan that would consider **all** sources of potential property tax relief, not just cutting neighborhood groups. It also called on our Neighborhood and Community Relations department to work with the Neighborhood and Community Engagement Commission and develop and implement a process to engage residents, neighborhoods and neighborhood organizations in the discussions.

I believe that such a study needs to be done if we are to have a chance of developing a good budget with community involvement that can both hold down property tax increase and avoid unwise cuts with dire consequences in the future. Such a study should take a careful look at all sources of potential property tax relief including, but not limited to:

- 1) The new consolidated TIF district,
- 2) All other TIF districts,
- 3) The Arena/Target Center ownership and funding,
- 4) Entertainment Tax revenue
- 5) The Convention Center Fund
- 6) The Municipal Parking Fund
- 7) The Self Insurance Fund
- 8) The new Neighborhood Community Relations Department
- 9) The Affordable Housing Trust Fund
- 10) Community Development Block Grant resources
- 11) All major contracts with outside firms, for possible renegotiations, including those with Unisys for technology services, Meet Minneapolis to promote the Convention Center and tourism and USI Wireless for wireless services.

I think the best example is the Target Center. While the Council majority was voting to damage neighborhood organizations by freezing their funds, Target Center debt was held completely harmless.

The Council majority and Mayor also held ourselves harmless, even as we were forcing cuts to neighborhood organizations, to Public Housing and to most of our departments. Neither the Council nor Mayor took a dollar in cuts. In fact, the Council amended the Mayor's proposed budget to shift a proposed one-time cut to the Clerk's Office. I find this highly objectionable.

I am disappointed to have to disagree with my colleagues and the Mayor on this fundamental decision. But I am most concerned by the prospect of the very real damage that this budget will have on neighborhood organizations.

Snow! This winter has been one for the record books. According to Public Works staff, in a typical winter season we will have some 20 to 25 minor precipitation events that require moderate responses, and 3 to 4 Snow Emergencies – for an entire season. That’s about a 6:1 ratio of minor to major events. So far this year, **five of the eight** snow events have resulted in Snow Emergencies and one of them (the 17 inch snowstorm) resulted in two back-to-back Snow Emergencies. This ties the record of six in a season, and it is still December. As you’ve likely heard, this has led the city to declare Winter Parking Restrictions, which prohibit parking on the even side of all Non-snow-Emergency routes until enough snow thaws to allow good access to all residential streets. Please help your neighbors comply with these restrictions, and with any further Snow Emergencies that are declared. Thank you for your patience and help as we get through this snowier-than-usual winter.

Urban Agriculture Plan. The draft Urban Agriculture Topical Plan has been released. This is a major step forward in the work of Homegrown Minneapolis. The plan recommends some significant policy changes such as allowing commercial growing of food in Minneapolis and allowing more community gardens. You can view the draft plan here: www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/cped/urban_ag_plan.asp. Two community meetings will be held to discuss the content of the plan: **Tuesday, January 11th**, 6:30-8pm at the Sabathani Community Center, 310 E 38th St; and **Thursday, January 20th**, from 2-3:30pm at North Central Library, 1315 Lowry Ave N. There will be a public hearing on the plan in February at the Planning Commission.

School Information Fairs. Are you trying to find the right school for your son or daughter? If so, plan on attending an upcoming **Pre-K-8 School Information Fair** hosted by Minneapolis Public Schools: Saturday, January 8th, 9am-2pm, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, 1300 Nicollet Mall. The information fair is an important way to learn about the many schools in town and also meet principals, teachers and coordinators. Parents with children entering pre-kindergarten, kindergarten or moving on to middle school for the 2011-12 school year are strongly encouraged to attend. Child care will be available through Minneapolis Kids, the MPS school age childcare program. Parking is available at the Loring parking ramp (1330 Nicollet Avenue) and will be validated for up to two hours. All school choices must be made using the district’s School Choice request card. Those cards are due in on February 8, 2011. For more information about the fair or school choice, please call Student Placement Services at (612) 668-1840 or visit www.mpls.k12.mn.us.

Digital Inclusion Grants. The Digital Inclusion Fund has awarded 11 grants totaling \$100,000 to organizations across the city for programs to promote technology access and technology literacy. These are the third set of grants awarded from the Digital Inclusion Fund, which was created in 2007 as part of the “Wireless Minneapolis” contract between the City of Minneapolis and US Internet Wireless, the company that owns, built and manages the citywide wireless network. The “Wireless Minneapolis” contract included a Community Benefits Agreement that was the first of its kind in the country, and the Digital Inclusion Fund is a key component of the agreement. For a list of the latest grant recipients, go to www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/wirelessminneapolis and click on “what’s new.”

Summer Employment. Although it’s winter, now is a great time to be thinking about summer jobs. Teenagers should start applying now for the Minneapolis STEP-UP Program so they’ll be ready to earn money once school ends. Business owners and managers should also get motivated to so they can start hiring and training tomorrow’s workforce. Thousands of Minneapolis youth have landed summer jobs since 2004 through the City of Minneapolis STEP-UP Program. All Minneapolis youth, ages 14-21, are eligible to apply. The program trains and places youth in paid internships at local businesses. Youth selected for STEP-UP must attend

work readiness training in April to be considered for a summer position. Earn \$7.25 to more than \$10.00 per hour and work part-time for up to nine weeks during the summer. Applications will be accepted from now until February 4, 2011. Call 612-673-5041 for more information or see the website (www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/cped/stepup.asp) for more information.

Bicycle Advisory Appointee. I have appointed longtime cyclist and Seward resident **Bob Hain** to be the Ward 2 representative on the new Bicycle Advisory Committee (or BAC). Bob has been active on the previous BAC for several years, as well as participating in various ways in the Seward Neighborhood Group. It was a difficult decision, because there were four great applicants from the Second Ward, including three past or current BAC participants. I look forward to working with Bob as the new group gets underway. My Policy Aide, Robin Garwood, will be seeking the Council Staff position on the new BAC, and given his years of work on the BAC and on bicycling issues generally, I'm optimistic that he will be appointed.

New Second Ward Commissioners. Three Second Ward residents are joining Minneapolis advisory commissions this month: **Bill O'Connor** and **Jonna Kosalko** are joining the Minneapolis Arts Commission and **Ginny Lackovic** is joining the Heritage Preservation Commission. Thanks to you all for your willingness to volunteer your time to make Minneapolis a better place, and welcome!

Franklin Frolic. This year's Franklin Frolic was a blast. As a judge for the best lighting competition I was very impressed by the festive lights and holiday spirit on display at participating businesses throughout the neighborhood. I hope that the event continues in future years.

33rd and Minneapolis. The intersection of Minneapolis Avenue S and 33rd Ave S is the only uncontrolled intersection in Seward, the only one in Ward 2, and one of the last 10 or so uncontrolled intersections in the whole city. It's a skewed four-way (because Minneapolis is at an angle to the grid) with one one-way leg. My office has heard from at least one resident about this intersection over the years. It's confusing, and that confusion could contribute to accidents. Public Works has been putting stop signs up at uncontrolled intersections in Minneapolis since 2004. 33rd and Minneapolis is one of the last. They will be making a recommendation to me about how to signalize this intersection within the next two months. I look forward to working with the Seward Neighborhood Group to come up with a solution that works for everyone.

Franklin Bridge. Hennepin County has decided to spend \$1 million to hire a consultant to plan for the renovation of the Franklin Avenue Bridge next year. The County has scheduled the construction for 2014. It's not yet clear whether the project will require the bridge to be completely re-decked, but that is one of the options.

Parking on East Franklin. The Seward business community has come up with a set of comprehensive, unified parking restrictions for both sides of Franklin Avenue, from 20th to 28th Avenues. If implemented, they would limit parking to 90 minutes, between early morning and late evening in all current parking spots. Individual businesses would retain the option to pay for a shorter time restriction. 81% of the 21 businesses and property owners who responded to a survey earlier this month support the change, as do the Seward Neighborhood Group and Seward Civic and Commerce Association. My staff has put the request in to Public Works, and have heard that the changes will be made this spring.

Tri-State Bearing Building. The Seward Neighborhood Group Community Development Committee has taken up the issue of the old Tri-State Bearing building, and neighbors' concerns about the storage of junk and automobiles around the property. The City has assessed the property for \$15,400 in unpaid zoning citations. Mr. Henderson attempted to appeal, but he didn't file the paperwork in time. The City Attorney has made a motion for dismissal, and they are confident that they will prevail. Zoning staff could issue a new citation for \$2,000 at any time, based on noncompliance with an order issued in October. The motion from the CDC was for my staff to request that Zoning staff hold off on issuing the \$2,000 fine a) for one month, at the end of

which Mr. Henderson must have made significant progress on cleaning up around the building, and, if he does, b) for another two months, when Mr. Henderson will report back to the CDC in March on his long-term solution for the building. My staff has made this request of Zoning, and has heard that they will follow this direction.

Lots at 20th Ave and 7th St S. The City has released a Request for Proposals for the two City-owned lots on the northwest corner of 20th Avenue and 7th Street South. The RFP Overview can be found at: <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/cped/rfp.asp>. Proposals are due by 4pm on Thursday, February 10. A question and answer session about the RFP will be held on Monday, January 10 at 10:30am at 105 5th Ave S, in Suite 400. For further information regarding submission requirements people can call Earl Pettiford at 612-673-5231. The neighborhood organization will have the opportunity to make recommendations about the proposals, and I hope and expect that the Cedar Riverside NRP will work with a contractor to put in a proposal. I am optimistic that we will see construction at the site this spring or summer.

Environmental Education Grants. Congratulations to the Somali Confederation of MN, Eastside Neighborhood Service and the Longfellow Community Council for applying for and getting Hennepin County grants to implement environmental education projects in 2011. The Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota, based Cedar-Riverside Neighborhood, will educate and engage Somali youth in reducing waste and recycling activities in after-school programs. The Eastside Neighborhood Services will facilitate environmental classes and implement service learning projects in order to empower youth and foster intergenerational relationships. The Longfellow Community Council will implement a water quality education program that will include organizing a river cleanup and a storm drain cleanup contest. The selected groups will receive training, technical assistance and up to \$5,000 to implement activities from an Environmental Education Toolkit developed by the county. To learn more visit: <http://www.hennepin.us/portal/site/HennepinUS/menuitem.b1ab75471750e40fa01dfb47ccf06498/?vgnnextoid=693f81631f23d210VgnVCM2000000a124689RCRD>

Federal grant to fund streetcar plans. Minneapolis will receive a \$900,000 federal grant to study the best transit improvements on two of the city's long-term streetcar network corridors, Nicollet and Central avenues between Columbia Heights and 46th Street South. The Alternatives Analysis grant program is the first key milestone in the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) New Starts process which is the primary source for federally funded transit projects. It will study various costs and benefits, route options, and other important considerations that need to be taken into account as part of FTA's process, known as New Starts. This is an important and exciting first step towards possible future federal funding. In the last 14 months, the U.S. Department of Transportation has awarded \$408 million to build streetcar lines in several City's that had already completed the alternatives analysis including Atlanta, St. Louis, Charlotte, Fort Worth, Portland, and Tucson. The "Nicollet-Central Urban Circulator Alternatives Analysis" project will evaluate and select the best transit improvements for Nicollet Avenue from the 46th Street Bus Rapid Transit station to Nicollet Mall in downtown and Central Avenue from the Columbia Heights Transit Center to Nicollet Mall via Hennepin and First avenues north.

There are currently openings on the Advisory Committee on People with Disabilities, Public Health Advisory Committee, Public Housing Authority Board of Commissioners, Senior Citizens Advisory Committee, and Zoning Board of Adjustment. To apply, call (612) 673-3358 or email cityclerk@ci.minneapolis.mn.us.

I wish you and your all a happy, healthy, peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Gratefully yours, in peace and cooperation,

Cam Gordon
Minneapolis City Council Member, Second Ward

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