



Minneapolis
City of Lakes

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Council Member Cam Gordon's Report to Southeast Como, 12-7-10

Cam's next Southeast Como Office Hours:
Tuesday, December 14th, 9:30-11:00am
SECIA Office, 837 15th Ave SE

Items:

- 1) 2011 Budget
- 2) Talmadge Snow Plowing
- 3) 1082 17th Ave SE
- 4) Redistricting Amendment Passes
- 5) Homegrown Minneapolis Meeting this Thursday
- 6) MPCA Solid Waste Plan
- 7) Openings on City Boards and Commissions

- 1) 2011 This year's budget is the most difficult I have experienced since taking office. By now, all property owners in Minneapolis should have received their notice for proposed property tax for 2011. Many, if not all, have seen increases over 2010. The second of three public hearings on the tax levy and budget was held in November, and we heard many concerns about the proposed levy and budget. The biggest concerns we heard about related to a cut in funding for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (from \$10 million to 8) and the dramatic increase in property taxes. The typical increase, based on the calls and emails I have received, is between 15 – 18%. 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 proposed levy and budget.

This morning, the Ways and Means Committee chair moved forward a set of amendments which would cut an additional \$6.1 million from the proposed 2011 budget. The cuts would lower the City's property-tax levy increase from the 7.5% reflected in the notices to 4.7%. Unfortunately at a 4.7% levy increase, the "typical" Minneapolis property-tax bill for a \$196,000 home will be only \$42 smaller than it would have been under the 7.5% levy increase that homeowners saw reflected in their Truth in Taxation statements.

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 Mayor's proposed Pension Management Plan; and a \$250,000 reduction in funding for maintenance and improvements of City Hall building. Looking into future years there is also a proposal that would put a freeze on wages for two years. Because of the 23 collective bargaining units and the timing of their contracts, this would be phased in over 3 years.

I am supportive of many, if not all, of these ideas, but will be gathering information and welcome comments and concerns as I determine how I will vote. One idea, however, has me very concerned. This involves dramatic changes to the Neighborhood d Revitalization Program (NRP) and includes directing staff to "immediately freeze all expenditures from the former NRP" while the City seeks legislation to move some or all of the money currently in NRP to the new Neighborhood and Community Relations Department to pay for neighborhood programs. This would then allow us to cut by 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. While I am open to reducing the size of the TIF district, I believe we should do this by using only the unobligated NRP money (under 1 million dollars) and reducing the amount of TIF money we use to pay back Target debt, not by going back on the commitments we have made to neighborhoods or altering the allocations the City Council unanimously approved in June to fully fund NRP Phase II. I believe that it is time, instead, to take a serious look at transitioning ownership of the Target Center to a

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regional or statewide entity like the Metropolitan Sports Commission.

One more public hearing on the City's proposed 2011 budget to give the public a chance to share their thoughts on the proposed budget and tax levy will be held on Monday, Dec. 13, 6:05 p.m. in City Hall, 350 South 5th Street, room 317. Please feel free to comment at or outside the meeting.

Whatever happens with this year's budget, I believe that the annual property tax increases levied in the last few years are not sustainable. I will continue to work to make sure we are managing this difficult financial situation in a way that balances the need to keep taxes down with the need to avoid drastic cuts in critical services that would lead to more expensive long term consequences. As I see a need for state tax and pension reform, my focus will be on making sure that all our departments are investing our money wisely for the short, and long, term benefit of all our residents.

- 2) My office has been made aware that there were issues during the last snow emergency on Talmadge Ave between 17th and 18th Avenues. It appears that City enforcement staff wrongly ticketed cars that were parked as directed by street signs, which indicate that cars are to be parked opposite from the normal "odd/even" system used in the rest of Minneapolis. These signs were clearly installed due to the traffic diverters. I have heard from City staff that they would be willing to remove these signs, at least on the block between 17th and 18th, and return that stretch to the standard "odd/even" system. I would appreciate SECIA's input and guidance on this proposal.
- 3) My office has been working for several weeks to clarify what has occurred at 1082 17th Ave SE during the fire restoration project. Here is what we have learned. The total height of the house has increased by sixteen inches. We do not yet have the height as it is calculated in the zoning code (the midpoint between the peak and the eaves), but because the peak was 38' and is now 39'4", it seems extremely likely that the house was and continues to be taller than a new house would be allowed to be built at this time. However, it is clear from the information that both the contractor and Building Inspections staff have shared with my office that the height increase is due solely to building code requirements. The roof was damaged enough by the fire that it had to be completely replaced. The new roof was required to meet the current energy code, which specifies attic insulation with an "R value" of 38 or more, to increase the energy efficiency and sustainability of the home. This dictates that the roof include more space between the 3rd floor ceiling and the shingles. Building Inspections staff have confirmed that the interior, habitable space has not increased. At a Southeast Como resident's request, I have asked that the Zoning Administrator communicate his determination on this issue to SECIA.
- 4) One bright point of an otherwise difficult election was the overwhelming support by the people of Minneapolis for a better way of changing ward boundaries after this year's census. By a vote of **55%**, the voters of Minneapolis rejected the old, overtly politicized process – in which our ward boundaries were drawn by a Redistricting Commission comprised of representatives of the Republican and Independence Parties, which hold no elected offices in Minneapolis at any level – in favor of allowing the Charter Commission to redraw the maps. There is work to do to ensure that the Charter Commission will include diverse voices and viewpoints (geographic, ethnic, and political) when doing their work, and to ensure that the process they use is open, transparent, and inclusive. But I am convinced that this is a major step in the right direction, and I am proud to have started the process a year ago with Council Members Glidden and Benson.
- 5) There will be a community meeting on the Homegrown Minneapolis effort I have been leading, which aims to bring more healthy and local food and urban agriculture in Minneapolis. The meeting will be this **Thursday, December 9th** from 5:30-7:30 pm at the UROC (Urban Research and Outreach Center), 2001 Plymouth Avenue North. Everyone is welcome. Look for more information here: <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dhfs/homegrown-home.asp>.
- 6) I submitted comments on the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Metro area Solid Waste Plan. I commended the agency for several things, including calling for limits on the total waste going to landfills, instituting a 'floor' for recycling, composting, and reduction; as well as calling for extended producer responsibility and mandatory recycling programs for commercial, industrial, and institutional sectors. I also criticized the plan and called for the MPCA to adopt stronger and clearer organics recovery goals; to clarify that burning waste, even when it is converted to energy, is not a preferred solution; and to put forward a bold long-term zero-waste vision for a Metro area in which all waste is treated as a resource.
- 7) There are openings on the Bicycle Advisory Committee, Public Health Advisory Committee, Public Housing Authority Board of Commissioners, Senior Citizens Advisory Committee, Youth Violence Prevention Executive Committee and Zoning Board of Adjustment. To apply, call (612) 673-3358 or email cityclerk@ci.minneapolis.mn.us.