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Import

\$1.9M cut in mayor's budget OK'd

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By Angela Carter

DeStefano's original request was \$445.2 million. If approved by the full Board of Aldermen at a special budget meeting May 29, revenue needed from property taxes would be reduced by \$4.4 million. The tax rate to support the changed budget would be 42.29 mills, rather than the 43.29 proposed by the mayor.

But for those at the Finance Committee's deliberations, the panel did not go far enough.

"I'm disappointed," said Ken Joyner, a Newhallville resident who has faithfully attended a series of workshops and public hearings on the budget plan.

A grass-roots citizens group submitted a report asking for a 10 percent reduction in each city department, and suggested some areas of the budget to target.

"We don't see one department with a 10 percent reduction. We put in hours and hours, and weeks and weeks of thoughtful work. They didn't even listen to us," said Mona Berman, a Wooster Square property owner and member of the citizen group. "We have no recourse other than to vote people out."

Committee Chairman Sergio Rodriguez, D-26, of Westville and board President Carl Goldfield, D-29, of Beaver Hills, told Joyner and Berman, following the committee meeting, that aldermen worked with the administration to identify reductions, but significant savings would have to come from negotiations in future employee contracts.

"Labor costs is the biggest chunk of (the budget) and that requires really fundamental reform in how we negotiate contracts," Goldfield said, adding that one area of savings could be shifting from a defined benefit pension plans to a defined contribution plan, which would be similar to 401(k) savings plans seen in the private sector.

The cuts passed by the committee include slashing \$100,000 from the \$900,000 subsidy now provided to Tweed New Haven Regional Airport; delaying the seating of a class of fire recruits for six months and gradually adding 26 civilian positions to the Police Department; and four police officer recruits would attend an outside academy instead of seven, as originally planned.

Firefighter Patrick Egan, president of Firefighter Local 825, said that because of controversy over how the fire

test was scored, "I think a delay in hiring was inevitable, for financial reasons or ethical reasons."

Newhallville Alderman Charles Blango, D-20, wanted a \$200,000 reduction in Tweed's subsidy and recommended that it be taken over by the state. "This would be a grand opportunity, that if business owners want the airport, they will come to the table," he said.

A vacant position in the library system and a requested receptionist position in the human resources department were eliminated. A \$65,000 public information officer job in the Police Department was saved, but the administration still must reduce spending by that amount.

Policy amendments, which have no cost implications, included reassessing whether 26 civilians would be needed after an outside research firm evaluates the Police Department's operations; and directing appropriate Board of Education and city administrators to calculate possible savings if the city slows the pace of school construction on buildings where reconstruction or renovation projects have not yet been approved by the city or state.

"I am not advocating that we stop any schools that have gone through the (approval) process," said Hill Alderman Jorge Perez, D-5, of the Hill.

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