

# NEW HAVEN INDEPENDENT

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## Aldermen Pass Budget; Look To Future

BY MELISSA BAILEY | MAY 30, 2007 10:31 AM | [PERMALINK](#) | [COMMENTS \(18\)](#)



Melissa Bailey Photo

In overwhelmingly passing a new \$443 million city budget, aldermen also got started on the *next budget* — voting to start early in looking for long-term cuts in city spending demanded by citizen watchdogs.

The Board of Aldermen voted 25 to 4 at Tuesday night's meeting to approve the new FY07-08 budget, imposing a tax rate of 42.21 mills. Citizen watchdogs who poured into City Hall to witness a final budget vote didn't see much additional short-time relief, but they did see measures put in place to manage long-term costs.

The new FY07-08 budget represents an increase of 6.54 percent or \$27.2 million

over the budget for FY06-07. The new mill rate is adjusted to reflect a five-year phase-in of property revaluations.

"We have made every effort, I believe successfully, to limit the amount we spend against the services that our citizens demand and deserve," said Aldermanic President Carl Goldfield in a statement after the vote.

"Today's decision is a hard one for everyone," said Mayor John DeStefano, Jr. in a statement after the three-hour special budget meeting Tuesday. "Despite being a difficult budget year, we can celebrate the fact that we are able to freeze property taxes for seniors, implement a phase-in for all other taxpayers and strengthen public safety resources, all while doing our very best to minimize the financial impact on tax paying residents." (Click [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) for stories in which he justifies his choices).

A series of last-minute proposed cuts met little success Tuesday, but a plan to aim for long-term savings was put in place.

Westville Alderman Sergio Rodriguez, who chairs the finance committee, said the board did its best to preserve the "delicate balance between ensuring that our property tax payers are not over burdened and meeting the city's fiscal needs."

### The Future

Aldermen agreed to one specific cost-cutting measure: Delaying the new class of fire recruits by another three months at a savings of about \$320,000. They also agreed to continue a contract to buy energy on the open market — a measure whose savings are not predictable, but which could save the city millions. A series of last-minute attempts to further whittle the budget down on the aldermanic

floor — including slashing the Board of Education budget by \$2 million — failed.

The most significant amendment that passed in the meeting concerned not what small items could be trimmed, but how to get a handle on soaring costs in the future.



The amendment, introduced by Rodriguez (pictured), calls for a more aggressive agenda of reform over the way the city handles the major driving forces behind the ever-expanding budget — primarily health care, pensions and debt service.

Suggestions include restructuring employee benefits when city employee contracts come up: Considering a switch in pensions plan from defined-benefit plan to a defined-contribution plan; searching for health care savings; and considering reform of overtime, longevity and sick time arrangements.

“The real cost drivers are the result of long-term contracts that cannot simply be unwound,” said Ward 1 Alderman Nick Shalek, who works at the Yale investments office investments and worked on the proposal. Employee contracts are negotiated between unions and the mayor’s office, then go to an aldermanic vote. Shalek called for aldermen to make “clear policy decisions” on employee benefits before negotiations take place, in attempt to guide the process.

The amendment also calls for a method the school system has already adopted as a core philosophy — performance-based, data-driven learning. Aldermen call for restructuring the way the budget’s written to a “performance-based” format where departmental efficiency becomes more transparent.

For example, said Shalek: The parks department budget would be broken down by services, so a reader could see exactly how much was spent on tree trimming, and how many trees were trimmed, and adjust resources accordingly, instead of just copying the budget from the year before. Achieving such documentation may mean a short-term investment in better IT tools, such as a municipal services hotline.

“We must do a better job documenting the results,” said Shalek — “making sure the decisions we make are based on those results, not just on decisions we made in history.”

Last year, aldermen got cracking on the budget in July, and as a result of joint talks with the administration, agreed to buy energy on the open market, at a savings of “millions,” Shalek said. Aldermen Tuesday agreed the move had been successful — they voted unanimously to continue the authority of the Energy Procurement Committee to negotiate procurement of natural gas and electricity for the period of July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008.

The Rodriguez amendment, which received unanimous approval Tuesday, calls for a mayoral report on the above matters and other long-term cost-savings ideas, with “concrete proposals for reform,” in September, so the process of long-term planning can begin.

### **Late-Game Slimming Flops**

Noting that proposal gave taxpayers “no immediate savings,” Hill Alderman Jorge Perez (pictured) announced a package of short-term cuts totaling \$3.6 million.



The biggest cut — slashing \$2 million from the Board of Education — failed by a 7 to 18 vote, with those who work for the Board of Ed — Aldermen Katrina Jones, Charles A. Blango and Michelle Edmonds-Sepulveda — abstaining. Opponents charged Perez’s proposals, unlike others’, were given last-minute on the aldermanic floor, giving aldermen insufficient time to examine them or understand the impact the cuts would have.

“I do not know whether these proposals are desirable or not — the reason is, this is the first time we have learned of them tonight,” responded East Rock Alderman Ed Mattison,

who voted against each of Perez’s proposals. “I want to say yes to so much of this, but I don’t think we have justification” for the last-minute cuts, agreed East Rock Alderman Roland Lemar.

Some alders, including Alderwomen Ina Silverman and Erin Sturgis-Pascale, stood up and cautioned against the cuts to the Board of Ed, because the impact was not detailed, and state funding still not secured.

Dwight Alderwoman Joyce Chen supported all of Perez’s ideas. “The proportional impact on education will be much less than the proportional impact that taxpayers will feel,” she said of the Board of Ed cut.

Perez said while he had missed a non-binding deadline last week for aldermen to submit proposals so that others could read them ahead of time, he had the right to make amendments on the floor, and was just “plagiarizing” ideas already discussed at the finance committee.

Many members backed him up. “We have to be willing to be flexible because ultimately we’re serving the public,” said Chen.

The rest of Perez’s package proposed cutting funds to vacant positions — those that had been newly added or for which no suitable candidates had yet been found. Another proposal was to not pay the police department three months’ worth of salaries that had been slated for new recruits. The department had requested funds for 45 new recruits but was unable to fill all positions with suitable candidates. A new class currently being recruited would not start until April anyway, Perez argued, so the money would not have been used, and the proposal would not deplete police services nor take anyone’s salary away.

Bishop Woods Alderman Gerald Antunes, a former city detective, supported the measure, which would have saved the city \$428,000.

Perez’s package was split up into two amendments — one slashing the Board of Education budget, and the other proposing personnel savings of \$1.6 million. The latter failed at a 12 to 17 vote.

After Perez’s package failed, an effort was made to push parts of it through as single amendments. Antunes proposed delaying funds to the police recruit class (as described above) and delaying funds to new civilian posts by three months because suitable candidates had not been found. Neither would lose the city any services, Antunes argued. Both proposals failed by votes of 12 to 15.

East Shore Alderman Al Paolillo suggested Perez’s idea of delaying the fire class by three months, because of controversy around the test and because the increase in overtime, would not cost the city

extra, since firemen are paid straight time for overtime work. That idea passed, with a 19 to 6 vote, saving the city \$320,206.

Paolillo made a second proposal to cut another \$100,000 from the subsidy to Tweed-New Haven airport, from \$800,000 to \$700,000. "This can't and shouldn't be an allocation in our budget made in perpetuity," he argued. The measure failed by a margin of 13 to 14.

### The Big Vote

At the end of the day, only \$320,206 was shaved off the budget Tuesday, in addition to the **\$1.9 million the finance committee had agreed to cut** at its June 30 meeting (click here to read a story on those cuts).

The mayor's original total \$445.2 million budget was slimmed down to \$442,982,888, by Rodriguez' calculations. In all, aldermen's efforts dropped the mayor's proposed 44.85 mill rate to 42.21 mills.

The total budget received four "no" votes, from Aldermen Andrea Jackson-Brooks, Dolores ColÃ³n, Michael Smart and an emphatic Robert Lee. All others voted yes, except Downtown Alderwoman Bitsie Clark, who was absent for the evening. Aldermen Katrina Jones, Charles Blango and Michelle Edmonds-Sepulveda abstained from voting on the education portion of the budget.

Jeffrey Kerekes (pictured at the top of this story at left) was one of a half-dozen diehard citizen budget watchdogs who stayed for the entire three-hour hearing. Kerekes led a team of citizens who **created their own budget proposal** with alternative ideas, but few concrete proposals for specific cuts. Their main contribution: Getting the city to eliminate a "water cooler" budget, so city employees now have to drink from the tap or fountain.

"The cuts they were planning were not very substantial — I'm not happy with that," said Kerekes, who took notes on each alderman's vote. He was particularly displeased that certain elements of Perez's package, to cut vacant positions that the city has had trouble filling, did not pass. "That's ridiculous they're putting the money in, and there's no one there."

Fellow budget watchdog Ken Joyner was skeptical of Rodriguez' long-term planning amendment, which he called "redundant," because the mayor is already required to file financial reports on overtime and healthcare costs.

Kerekes said his group, **New Haven Citizen' Action Network**, would stick with the process as aldermen move to the long-term planning process. Would long-term cost-cutting efforts make the short-term increase easier to handle?

Kerekes had cautious optimism: "If something comes out of it, then yes."

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### Comments



POSTED BY: **CEDARHILLRESIDENT** | MAY 30, 2007 10:57 AM

Aldermen Andrea Jackson-Brooks, Dolores ColÃ³n, Michael Smart and Robert Lee THANK YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!!! for being Aldermen of the people!! As far as the people voted against Jorge Perez amendment....I do not get it! For one year that temp fix to help the people that live here, you should

of let it go through. Then they even broke it in two so that the one thing you said made you uncoforatable (the ed cut) was not included and you still did not vote it through?? So what was your excuse then?? OHHH I am just to mad right now. I did call the Office of legislative services for a list of who voted for what but she was overwhelmed so I will hopefully get that list tomorrow. People of New Haven you should know what your alderman voted for and who let us down!!

**POSTED BY: TIM KANE | MAY 30, 2007 11:58 AM**

Thank you, Jeff, Ken and Mona, for 'being there', being visible, and taking notes on this. And thank you to everyone who spoke at the various meetings, bringing your unique points of view to the table. You've certainly raised my awareness to the process, and also to the worth of the grass-roots movement to hold our elected officials accountable. While I appreciated seeing the last-ditch efforts by some of the alders to lower the mill even more, I expected nothing less than the virtual rubber stamp the Board of Aldermen placed on this year's budget - the citizenry just got involved too late.

And again, while I am cynical of the motivations of those involved on the city government side of things, I do appreciate the time they put in, studying the budget, trying to make decisions that benefit all. We ALL need to keep an eye on this process - if we start now, change can be effected for next year's budget. Now, I'm off to check the classifieds for a second job, to pay my taxes...

**POSTED BY: WJAY | MAY 30, 2007 1:04 PM**

Melissa Bailey wrote:

The Big Vote

At the end of the day, only \$320,206 was shaved off the budget Tuesday, in addition to the \$1.9 million the finance committee had agreed to cut at its June 30 meeting (click here to read a story on those cuts).

Not so fast, the mayor and not the finance committee, proposed the 1.931M reduction. At the same time, the mayor and not the finance committee proposed a 1.977M increase in the parking fines and fees for building permits and all other services resident require through the hall of records.Thus increasing the reduced complement by 46K. At the end of the day the city will realize a substantial increase over the original budget of 445M, or the 442.9M reported above. The budget has been ratified without adding the elderly tax freeze cost, estimated by the city to be 1.2 to 1.7M.which will raise the general fund budget back up to 445.6M. It should be clear to all that this finance committee labored since March 6,2007 tirelessly, in order to deliver a budget with increased spending. There was a core group of alderpersons on the finance committee from wards, 1, 13, 14, 20, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29 who consistently voted against any and all amendments to reduce the budget. You know who they are!!



**POSTED BY: JEFFREYKEREKES | MAY 30, 2007 1:39 PM**

Hello All. I have the data up about how each alder voted last night on [our website](#). Please continue to contact your alders to let them know how you feel about this budget beting passed. Also note, **this is an election year for both the Mayor and for all of the alders**. We have a chance to express our concerns on this matter in November. I truly believe this must be a long term process on the part of citizens pressuring the BOA and the Mayor to effect change. I encourage you to stay involved in the process.

Thank you to everyone who turned out for the meeting last night and for your calls to the alders. Lets keep the pressure on for greater fiscal responsibility. Check out our [our BOA Accountability Project website](#).

**POSTED BY: DISSAPOINTED | MAY 30, 2007 4:07 PM**

I'm mildly dissapointed with everyone, including this Citizens Budget group.

The Alders had an impossible job, I know, but they should have done more - even Jorge Perez's pretend amendments were just meant as a show for the media, he never even told most of his colleagues before hand that he planned on trying to do what he was doing - he knew it was going to fail all along so it was just a show for the media. I like Jorge, but he his flare for theatrics doesn't trick me anymore. He'll get the plaudits form a few, but thse of us who've been around long enough no that his "hard work" was a sham.

To the Mayor's [supporters] who showed no sense of independence and voted for EVERYTHING- That means Alders Mattison, Sturgis-Pascale, Rivera,Blango,Morehead, Jones,Shah, Silverman,Rodriquez and Goldfield. Grow a spine. For Alders Shalek, Rhodeen,Lehtonen, and Sepulveda - You voted against the Mayor once, so I won't call you spineless, but you'll get no respect from me.

For the Citizens who showed up and complained about everything, try to do something with any meaning next time, not a fake budget plan that is grounded in reality and is just, at best, a high schoolers attempt at understanding New Haven governments responsibilities and restraints.

I worked in NH City Hall for 7 years and Hartford for 3 - I'd take NH's BOA over Hartford's any day. There are a lot of smart people on our BOA, but the Mayor has too much power over a lot of them.



**POSTED BY: CEDARHILLRESIDENT | MAY 30, 2007 4:39 PM**

Wjay

now we do..thank you for that info!!

Our problem with changing who is in office is there are very few Alder persons being challenged in the race this year. Can't vote someone out if there is know one to vote for. This now becomes a community issue. Each community has to find a candidate to run against there unchallenged alder person. Other wise we will have the same people again doing the same dang things! With all the people that are involved in there communities that read the NHI there have to be a few challengers out there.

Come community leaders its time to challenge these shumucks!!

With all the people that are involved in there communities that read the NHI there have to be a few challengers out there.

Jeffrey thank you and your group for all the info! You got them on there toes this time around and I was so glad to finally meet you! The site is great!

**POSTED BY: RESPONSE TO CEDER HILL | MAY 30, 2007 4:49 PM**

Cedar Hill Resident -I'm pissed about this vote -but calling those who voted for the budget "schmucks" is a little aggressive, isn't. I know a large number of the alders, and I'm confident that most are fairly intelligent with some being downright brilliant. They all work and are all pretty committed to their neighborhoods and the City as whole. Be upset, but don't attack them. They are willing to spend their lives in meetings trying to make this City better for absolutely no pay and no positive feedback. are you willing to do that?



**POSTED BY: CEDARHILLRESIDENT | MAY 30, 2007 7:03 PM**

I know who that is....my buddy my pal right??? Ok you don't like the word schmuck ok then use the word that "Disappointed" used. I do not think schmuck is that aggressive of a word, I always thought of it as a word to described the kings jesters But hey tit for tat your comment seemed to be a bit more aggressive than mine :)

I do respect the job of the alder persons but these past few months I really saw some of them (not

all) working for someone other than there communities. I will never make alder person for the sole fact that a good part of my community I am not marketable to. But I am a VERY active community.

But back to the subject at hand I am with disappointed that they (not all) did not have the people of New Haven in mind at all. And is it fear that some people voted the way they did..maybe but I spoke with a few... they have been fighting the fight from day one...not for votes but because it was there jobs and those few I applied. But I think that Disappointed listed the names right!

Hey I have pictures of the empty seats at the aldermen meetings. So lets not make it seem as if they go to all those meetings. (so do but not all)

I did not get a street cleaning truck down my street this month and that was after complaining to the chief admin. Do you think the parks department are doing what they are suppose to be in my area, No, I am taking pictures of these things. Did I have to go to public works and bang on doors to get my street plowed yes!! Does State street on my end get cleaned no. We just started getting a few cops trickle in over here but that is because we have a new district manager. We have told our Alderman about a business in our community and he was suppose to do several things to help us, time after time only to blow us off and never do it. We have been begging him for years (yes Years) about the intersection of state and ferry to be fixed and even had the cops backing us up on it and he never followed trough for us. These are simple things that I pay for and they have not happened so yes I am mad that I have to pay even more for something I am not getting!!

But I am really mad because legitamate suggestions were put on the table and were not even considered by some I even saw them being laughed at.

Edith will not Stifle.

**POSTED BY: MONAB | MAY 30, 2007 9:09 PM**

Speaking for myself (and not as part of any group) I'd like to bring a few points to light. Make fun of the water cooler but... it at least has become a symbol of waste. Maybe we should adopt it as NH's logo. We have made a difference and we have proposed some solid suggestions- IT improvements, centralized ordering of services and contracts (phones, office supplies etc), alternative compensation packages, etc. We proposed getting an outside professional to evaluate the budget. Looks like that will happen. We proposed alternatives to the standard retirement package and now the Mayor has to report back to the BOA about that and performance based compensation by Sept.

At least the budget is making news. Now it's time for us to continue to put the pressure on. As Cedarhillresident said- find some folks to challenge the Alders. How about a good Mayoral candidate?



**POSTED BY: CEDARHILLRESIDENT | MAY 30, 2007 9:15 PM**

ps you are right I was a little rough sorry

**POSTED BY: GARY DOYENS | MAY 30, 2007 9:24 PM**

Ok Folks...time for fact checking. I'll keep it short and pointed before I post my Hall of Shame on last night's mighty tax and spend a lot plan.

1. NH CAN didn't just spike everything -- it made a lot of suggestions, many in fact that could have been acted on -- the NH BOA didn't though, just as they haven't acted on any suggestions given them across the last four years.
2. NH BOA does have smart people on it, but there were too few of them voting to cut the budget last night.
3. As for the board being made up of working folks and somehow that we should give them extra slack..well, la di da. So are all the citizens who followed this budget through its entire tortured time of phony hand wringing. Look, these people signed up for this gig -- I don't feel sorry for them. If they don't want it, if they can't take the heat...then quit or don't run again. It's that simple. But if you do

hold that job, then fulfill your fiduciary duty to the citizens. They are your constituency -- the mayor is not. The BOA is provide a check and balance -- not a rubber stamp.

4. Amendments were silly -- actually Disappointed, if you had attended the same meetings I did, you would have known the Perez spoke the truth -- he built on what the Finance Committee considered and in fact, agreed to. He just expanded it. Based on testimony at the BOA meeting, there was no good reason not to adopt at least some of them. But zero sum politics being what they are...ahem...they failed. I give him credit for trying.

5. To correct Mr. Rodriguez and the mayor who somehow think this budget is a delicate, fragile balancing act: Get real. It's a sledge hammer approach that rammed excessive unchecked spending down the throats of taxpayers... AGAIN. There never was a serious look for savings -- it was an exercise in giving the mayor exactly what he demanded while making it appear BOA members were empathetic and sensitive. (Pass the kleenex please.)

Once again though, the reality is your lack of backbone has hurt our families and lowered the standard of living for all who live here.



**POSTED BY: [JEFFREYKEREKES](#) | MAY 30, 2007 9:56 PM**

Dear 'Disappointed':

As someone who worked on the Citizens proposal, I welcome any of your experience and suggestions. We submitted it not as an alternative budget, but to stimulate ideas and discussion. Do you have specific criticisms of our proposal and/or ideas of your own? Have you made or submitted any of these suggestions? Please call me if you have ideas you wish to contribute. I hope you don't only offer your disappointment.

Please call me with your ideas.

Jeffrey Kerekes  
203-676-0880



**POSTED BY: OUR TOWN | MAY 31, 2007 9:07 AM**

NHI - Please publish a "How They Voted List."

**POSTED BY: GARY DOYENS | MAY 31, 2007 4:22 PM**

You can find the voting tallies under the NH Board of Aldermen (NH BOA) Accountability Project at NH CAN website.... [www.nhcan.org](http://www.nhcan.org)

**POSTED BY: WHAT ABOUT APPEALS | JUNE 1, 2007 1:14 AM**

Just a question. Since the Board of Assessment Appeals has not yet finished their duties, namely hearing over 1,000 appeals and determining if reductions are granted, how can a mil rate be established? Does this mean that everyone who presented an appeal is to be ignored? Or does it mean that there is already a built-in short fall of revenue? Let's face it some values are wrong and reductions are deserved if the appealant shows their case. Why has this not been adressed? It's also surprising give all the comments this topic generated that it was so quickly moved off the main page. Why?

**POSTED BY: GARY DOYENS | JUNE 1, 2007 11:14 AM**

Over a 1,000 cases is a lot, but even if they're adjusted down by an aggregate amount of say \$5 million as an example, that's only going to have a billable tax value of \$216,450 according the Finance Department's tax calculator which you can find at [www.nhcan.org](http://www.nhcan.org)

There is enough fat and flexibility built into this budget, it will be able to be absorbed without a hiccup. If the administration get really tight for some reason, like not managing police overtime very well (currently \$2.2 million over budget so far this year)they could delay hiring a few of the 77 new

employees by some period of months, which they voted down as an option to reduce taxes for next year.

But don't forget, the state is kicking in more dollars to New Haven than it has in previous years -- news reports say a dramatic increase. Since the state's budget isn't done, and our budget used lower than expected dollars from the state, there should be plenty of cash to cover any decrease to the grand list from revised property values.



**POSTED BY: CEDARHILLRESIDENT | JUNE 3, 2007 12:05 PM**

Gary thank you for your posts they are very educational!

As paul stated in his compost we are at least heading in a better direction. But I am still confused on one thing.

The Alderman ....I thought they represnt there communities not the city. Right?? I relize there justifications on the way they voted on things. But I feel almost all of them did not represent there communitys all but 4 stood there ground for there communitys.



**POSTED BY: NANCY DREW | JUNE 21, 2007 10:05 PM**

All current Board members and their spouses holding jobs that benefit from City administered grant money should be voted out of office.

The New Haven Register published an article "Most Alders Run Unopposed" last month documenting which alders and spouses employers receive City grant funds.

To the best of my recollection - Ed Mattison (Southern CT Behavioral Network), Sergio Rodriguez, (spouse RKids) Yusef Shah or Charles Blango (spouse Board of ED secretray), Arlene DePino (spouse state lobbyist). Their votes are compromised. They will never dramatically dissent against the Mayor.

Hats off to you Robert Lee for expressing outrage over the two state lobbying jobs in the Economic Development Office. Jobs that pay a combined \$150,000.00, for work that our own elected officials accomplish at no charge to the taxpayers! Patronage at its most excellent.

They should not be allowed to run for office.

**Sorry, Comments are closed for this entry**