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City budget has some seeing red

By Maria Garriga, Register Staff

NEW HAVEN — Some residents recently vented their frustration to an aldermanic committee over the proposed city budget and possible tax increases.

"It looks like the city will end this year in a deficit. There have got to be some cuts," said Tom Ahern at a hearing last week. Some residents spoke heatedly about city support for programs they claim are unnecessary in the face of a potential \$17 million shortfall.

New Haven Citizens Action Network members instead proposed budget cuts.

Jeffrey Kerekes and Harry David, two of the network's leaders, spoke strongly in favor of a proposal that would end city subsidies to some nonmunicipal organizations.

Kerekes asked why the city is paying interns \$80,000 a year. "What do they do?" he wondered.

Ahern specifically protested use of city funds for the business facade renovation program. He maintained the businesses could afford renovations without city help.

Ken Joyner, a network member, questioned a number of expenditures in the budget. Joyner also pointed to a line in last year's budget allocating \$200,000 for repairs to the city transfer station, a line item for repairs that appears again in this year's budget.

He also had concerns about \$1.9 million for overtime in the education budget, which he said was reported in the 2007-2008 budget, but not in the monthly budget report or in the 2008-2009 budget.

But when the New Haven Register made inquiries following the meeting, Joe Clerkin, city supervisor of management and budget, had some ready answers to Joyner's questions. The \$80,000 for interns actually pays stipends to 25 to 35 student-teachers from Quinnipiac University and the University of New Haven who work in city classrooms, he said.

As for the transfer station repairs, Clerkin said the \$200,000 funding is part of five-year capital improvement program that will end in 2009-10 with \$50,000.

Further, Clay Williams, who oversees the facade renovation program for the city Economic Development Administration, said that the match grant program is not needs-based. The city will match spending on approved facades up to \$30,000.

To the complaints about overtime in schools, Clerkin said the city had a detailed budget for Board of Education overtime. However, the school district's budget of \$1.9 million in overtime had been rolled up in the personnel category of the mayor's budget "and not separated out" as was done with other departments.

Aldermanic Finance Chairman Yusuf Shah, D-23, told the speakers that their concerns would be taken into consideration.

The aldermen typically vote on the budget in May.

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