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Aldermanic panel delays final action on budget decisions

Published: Thursday, May 8, 2008

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By Maria Garriga

NEW HAVEN ♦ Before a crowd of 100 angry taxpayers, the Board of Aldermen's Finance Committee postponed the final deliberations on next year's budget and sent the crowd home with an early adjournment.

The committee members need to decide where to make cuts to close a \$14 million budget shortfall and recommend those cuts to the full board, which makes the final decision.

Board president and committee member Carl Goldfield, D-29, said he made the motion to postpone because committee members need more specifics on the budget cuts proposed by city officials before they decide where cuts should be made.

♦ Literally, there's nothing we can do tonight with a \$14 million budget hole, ♦ Goldfield said. ♦ We're keeping the mill rate the same and we're in the middle of a revaluation. Taxes will go up. I think we're going to see shared sacrifices. ♦

Members of the public can speak at public hearings, but not at committee meetings, so protesters held up colorful signs such as, ♦ Make the Cuts, ♦ to make their point. Many came at the behest of the New Haven Citizens Action Network, a grass-roots group advocating budget cuts instead of tax increases.

♦ People came even though they knew they couldn't say anything. They came anyway, ♦ said Jeff Kerekes, network founder.

♦ Some of these folks work two jobs to make it. That's where working folks are at, ♦ said Gary Doyens, a network member.

Protesters simply want more budget cuts instead of higher taxes, said Wendy Hamilton, a registered nurse. She used a bullhorn in front of City Hall to recruit people for the meeting. Even without the bullhorn, people who said they do not get involved in politics came to protest by showing up.

♦ When I moved here my taxes were \$3,500, now they're at \$5,800. If they keep going up, I'll probably

move out of Connecticut. It's a pretty state, but it's very expensive to live here," said Jordan Bruce, 45, a city resident attending his first committee meeting. "I'm concerned New Haven is chasing people out because of taxes."

Tom Olson, 53, lives in North Haven, but came to the meeting because he owns several multi-family houses in New Haven.

"Taxes are going up as property values are going down. It doesn't make sense," he said. "Do they expect us to raise rents on people who can't even afford heat?"

The abrupt adjournment annoyed some protesters.

"What the hell happened here? Did they cancel because they didn't want all these people to hear?" said Rebecca Turcio of New Haven.

"I understand," said Alderwoman Katrina Jones, D-21, who attended the meeting, although not part of the finance committee. "I'm a politician, but I'm also a taxpayer."

Alderman George Perez, D-5, said he had concerns about the last minute budget revisions, which took some aldermen by surprise. He pointed to the time printed at the bottom of the budget. "It says it was printed 6:02 p.m. The meeting is supposed to start at 6 p.m."

The meeting started closer to 6:15 p.m.

"You come up to bat and the game is over," he said explaining his view of the finance committee's last meeting when confronted with last-minute budget changes. The postponement made sense to him.

"I'd rather have us take a little more time and know what we are talking about."

Alders say they see and understand the public's anger over high taxes, and they see the need to spread the burden.

"The raises for city workers should be reconsidered," said Alderwoman Migdalia Castro, D-16, "the sacrifices should be shared by all of us."

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