

New Haven Register

Serving New Haven, CT



[Past Stories](#)

Spending

Published: Thursday, June 5, 2008

[No comments posted.](#) | [Email to a friend](#) | [Print version](#) |  [ShareThis](#) |  [RSS Feeds](#)

plan rests

on union

givebacks

By Maria Garriga

NEW HAVEN — While critics continue to pan the \$455 million budget approved this week by the Board of Aldermen, defenders say the city's predicament left little wiggle room and still depends on \$6 million in givebacks from unions.

The package included major cuts to balance the budget, which had a \$14 million shortfall.

The unions have yet agreed on the givebacks, said Larry Amendola, president of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Local 3144.

"This has been a difficult budget," said Sean Matteson, chief of staff for Mayor John DeStefano Jr.

Many of the slashed programs had not merited being cut, but could not be prioritized enough to keep in the budget.

The budget, with slightly more than a 2 percent increase over last year's plan, required extensive cuts to meet the city charter's requirement that the board adopt a balanced budget by June.

Aldermen debated the cuts for nearly five hours. Many consider the budget the best it could be under the circumstances. Matteson praised aldermen for their thorough examination of the issue.

But Jeffrey Kerekes, founder of the New Haven Citizens Action Network, said, "The bottom line is taxes are still going up."

The budget would keep the city tax rate at 42.21, but the city is in the second year of five-year revaluation.

"They say the mill rate is staying the same but (taxes) will increase because of the phased-in revaluation," Kerekes said.

Becky Bombero, a policy analyst at the city Office of Management and Budget, said the city used a five-year phase-in for revaluation to give homeowners time to adjust to tax increases.

DeStefano had proposed cuts that would close Dwight School, cut \$500,000 from city homeless shelters, and shutter the Small Business Initiative, the Fair Rent Commission, a police substation and a senior center. The greatest saving would come from \$6 million in expected union concessions, or eliminating up to 150 jobs.

Amendola said unions would try to work with the city. "We have a number of suggestions that I gave to the city of what we might be able to do, and asked them to cost it out. It's more than fair. I would hate to see anyone laid off in this economy," he said.

Aldermen approved most of the mayor's cuts but saved West River Senior Center, the Fair Rent office and the Whalley Avenue police substation.

Tweed-New Haven Airport drew significant attention as several aldermen proposed substantial subsidy cuts. The subsidy eventually was reduced from \$750,000 to \$500,000.

Also under the spending plan, at least one city-supported shelter must close, leaving 100 homeless men on the street, said Gary Spinner, co-chairman of the New Haven Homeless Advisory Commission.

"You're going to see a lot more panhandling and a lot more homeless sleeping in doorways," Spinner said.

That particular cost-cutting measure faced fierce opposition from aldermen, and several attempted to restore the funds by transferring from other line items. Alderman Jorge Perez, D-5, succeeded in restoring \$150,000 for the homeless by transferring funds from firefighter overtime.

Rob Smuts, the city's chief administrative officer, said the aldermen's cuts to overtime in the Fire Department and the aldermen's projected increase in attrition, or not replacing retired employees, at the Police Department did not really qualify as cuts.

"These are fake cuts: the \$150,000 from fire overtime and adding to police attrition is imaginary money," he said.

Reader Comments

The following are comments from the readers. In no way do they represent the view of nhregister.com.

Submit a Comment

We encourage your feedback and dialog and ask you to follow a few simple guidelines when commenting on stories on nhregister.com.

- 1) Please post responsibly.
- 2) Be polite.
- 3) Don't hate.
- 4) If you object to someone's post, use the "Report Abuse" button and we'll review it.
- 5) Users who don't play by the rules will be blocked and won't be allowed to participate.
- 6) Self-promotion of businesses or advertisements of anything for sale are not permitted.

By posting here you agree to abide by our terms and conditions and privacy policy which can be viewed by clicking [here](#).

Name:

Email: (optional)

Comments:

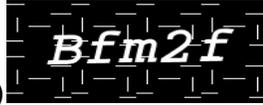


Image Verification: (Case sensitive)

Post Comment