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# DeStefano questioned about proposed \$464M city budget

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By Lauren Garrison, Register Staff

NEW HAVEN — Funding for Tweed New Haven Regional Airport, the decision to close three senior centers and a proposed freeze on the phase-in of revaluation were among items questioned by residents at Wednesday's budget presentation by Mayor John DeStefano, Jr.

The meeting, which was held at the Edgewood School and drew about two dozen residents, was the third community meeting on the budget. The fourth and final meeting is at 6:30 p.m. April 29 at Wexler/Grant Community School, according to city spokeswoman Jessica Mayorga.

On Wednesday, DeStefano presented a \$464 million proposed budget that aims to keep the tax rate stable, and described the economic climate in which it was developed. The city has seen a dramatic increase in foreclosures, the majority of which were on homes purchased with subprime loans. Unemployment has steadily increased and now hovers at more than 10 percent. Revenue from property taxes, recording fees for real estate transactions and short-term investment returns all are expected to drop next fiscal year, DeStefano said.

The proposed budget cuts at least 137 jobs, filled and vacant, including 19 civilian workers and two captains at the Police Department, 10 positions in the Finance Department, 17 in the Department of Public Works and 15 in the Department of Parks, Recreation and Trees.

Among the more contentious proposals in the budget was the closing of three senior centers: Westville, West River and Bella Vista. A woman in the audience Wednesday asked about the rationale behind closing the centers, and what could have been done to keep them open. She expressed concern that seniors would be denied meals that had been provided to them.

DeStefano replied that unions could have agreed to wage concessions to prevent employees from losing jobs. He assured the woman that the seniors would be provided with transportation to other nearby city senior centers that offer the same services as those that closed.

Harry David of the New Haven Citizens Action Network questioned several assumptions built into the proposed budget, including anticipated state aid and savings to be achieved by cutting positions, some of which are

vacant.

"I'm not really sure (the budget is) balanced at this point," David said.

He worried DeStefano would end up needing to raise taxes because of incorrect assumptions in the budget.

Jeffrey Kerekes, also with NHCAN, voiced concern over funding shortfalls faced by Tweed New Haven Regional Airport. He said the airport has an operating loss of \$350,000 this year and the governor plans to remove Tweed's annual \$570,000 subsidy from the state budget.

Kerekes said he believed these shortfalls weren't reflected in the budget presented by DeStefano. DeStefano replied that the city and East Haven are working together to lobby the state for Tweed funding.

After the meeting, Kerekes said he felt the city could have found other places to save in order to keep the senior centers open.

In particular, he pointed to the city paying lobbyists to represent it in Hartford and Washington, D.C. Kerekes said he didn't see why the city should pay for this service when it already has state and federal representatives to look out for its interests.

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## Reader Comments

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

say it ain't so wrote on Apr 3, 2009 7:22 AM:

" If the city would like to save money. Take out the expense for the City ID card \$200,000. The could bring back 5 jobs at least. Leaving some senior centers open, police stations open. Who is paying for the card expense this up coming year. Have we found any sponsors to give money to the city? This card is to represent that the immigrant community needs to feel welcomed. We are not going to support this program with taxpayer money. Are we going to touch the make Cities bank and take some money out from that. The money from the make Cities bank started this whole mess. No the bill will be placed on to the city taxpayers that only a few wish to hold. Please scrap the program it is not making the city any money and cost the city to see red ink. "

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JHC wrote on Apr 3, 2009 8:29 AM:

" Is City Hall asking Hartford for ID card funding ? also Something stinks "

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Durham Resident wrote on Apr 3, 2009 5:25 PM:

" "This card is to represent that the immigrant community needs to feel welcomed."

No, the purpose of the card is to reduce crime and allow the city to have a better workforce in the future. From a dollar for dollar perspective, it is probably the best investment in the entire city budget. "

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Truthtopower wrote on May 2, 2009 6:16 AM:

" Durham Resident: Try making that a taxpayer funded expense in your town, especially in these times. The number of new cards issued this year is maybe 1,500 - that's \$133 per card. A good investment? Only if you believe there is some other unquantifiable value intrinsic in the card. It has nothing to do with creating a better workforce. Until now, this program has been supported by two grants and the agreement with the NH BOA is that it always would be. One would hope it's not being quietly pushed on to the backs of taxpayers. "

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Truthtopower wrote on May 27, 2009 5:50 AM:

" This budget is a disgrace both in terms of content and in terms of taxation. It preserves an artificially high tax take from homeowners and families. We don't need more cops, we need better use of the cops we have. It's interesting to note that as a board leader and alder, Goldfield has supported every tax increase proposed and made no cuts. He once again says there is nothing that can be cut because there is little discretionary spending. What a disappointing statement - it continues to show that Goldfield spends too little time looking at the budget and is incapable or unwilling to cut it. Carl: As a BOA, you can chop any budget in there, not just the discretionary ones. After all this time on the BOA, you still don't understand how a city budget works? How is that possible? "

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