

NEW HAVEN INDEPENDENT

IT'S YOUR TOWN. READ ALL ABOUT IT.

Watchdog Seeks A Budget Brainstorm

BY Paul Bass | MAR 30, 2010 12:09 PM

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PAUL BASS PHOTO

Jeffrey Kerekes wants to pay the city more for his Australian Shepherd Luka. But he doesn't want to pay more taxes.

Welcome to one man's crusade to influence next year's city budget and avoid a tax increase without gutting the government.

Kerekes isn't alone, actually. He's part of a band of citizen watchdogs who have been showing up at city budget meetings for four years. They've scoured the hundreds of pages each year, sat through hours of official testimony, and suggested alternative ideas.

With this year's proposed \$476 million budget up for approval, Kerekes & co. have invited fellow citizens to contribute nuts-and-bolts ideas. Mayor John DeStefano [proposes raising homeowners' taxes](#) an average of 9 percent in the budget; he says the city's can't afford to lose momentum on school reform, public safety, and job creation. Kerekes argues that homeowners can't afford to pay more in taxes, and that a combination of budget cuts and new revenues can avoid that.

To that end, Kerekes, a therapist and realtor whose taxes have risen 72 percent over the past five years, has set up a spread sheet tallying citizens' suggestions.

[Click here](#) to see what ideas he's collected so far. (Note: The file has several tabs.) Kerekes invites people to email him more ideas [here](#).

And [click here](#) to see some of the ideas city employees submitted to their bosses as they put together the budget.

Kerekes has called for the mayor to order department heads simply to come up with 10 percent cuts, across the board.

But he also said he agrees the city shouldn't be cut to the bone, that it should find new revenue sources, too. For instance, he suggested raising parking meter rates by 50 cents next year, to \$1.75 an hour, instead of a 25-cent hike the city is planning. He'd prefer to see meter rates go up faster, rather than risk the [planned 25-year sale of city meter revenue](#) in return for short-term cash. He suggested upping fees at Tweed-New Haven Airport.

He also suggested that dog-owners like himself should pony up more like \$20 rather than the current \$8 for licenses. (He's pictured above with one of the two Australian Shepherds he walks regularly in Wooster Square Park. The other, Murphy, is camera-shy.)

Why advocate for higher fees but not higher taxes?

"People are going to lose their houses" if taxes rise any more, Kerekes argued. Taking on fees is often more of a discretionary choice than having a home.

"Dogs are expensive," he said. "You don't buy a dog unless you have money to pay for vets, dog food. You have 20 bucks versus eight bucks to pay a dog license; an extra 12 bucks for a dog license isn't going to kill you."

Comment

posted by: [jeffrey Kerekes](#) on March 30, 2010 12:18pm

Sign the online petition to cut the budget by 10%:

<http://www.PetitionOnline.com/NewHaven/petition.html>

Come to Celentano School Tonight 3/30/10 @ 6:30 to share your thoughts with the mayor.

Come April 28 at 6:30 to City Hall for the final public hearing.
