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DeStefano, aldermen debate New Haven budget (video)

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By Lauren Garrison, Register Staff
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NEW HAVEN — Mayor John DeStefano engaged in a rare public question-and-answer session Wednesday night with the Board of Aldermen's finance committee on the 2010-11 budget.

He advised the aldermen to look at six specific areas in the budget: public school expenditures, general expenditures, revenues, the capital budget, a plan to monetize city parking meters and possibly freezing the phase-in of revaluation.

At the end of their hour-long meeting, aldermanic President Carl Goldfield, D-29, said he'd already begun to invite groups of aldermen to discuss these areas. DeStefano said the city administration would also provide input.

A week earlier, hundreds of people who turned out for an aldermanic public hearing on the budget called for drastic cuts to the mayor's proposed \$476 million budget, which would increase the average homeowner's tax bill by about 8 percent.

The aldermen must pass a budget before July 1.

Several members of the New Haven Citizens Action Network group were in attendance Wednesday night, carrying signs that said, "I can't afford to (image of heart) New Haven!! No tax increase!!"

Jeffrey Kerekes, a member of the group, approached DeStefano as he entered aldermanic chambers and asked him to sign a petition demanding that the city's political leaders "rein in flagrant excessive spending" in the 2010-11 proposed budget. DeStefano told the Register on Tuesday, "I would sign that. I don't want a tax increase, too."

"I appreciate the offer," DeStefano told Kerekes Wednesday, as he walked away.

The group Tuesday said 1,000 taxpayers have signed the petition.

During the discussion, Finance Committee member Alderman Roland Lemar, D-9, said that, in general, residents are more willing to accept a service reduction than a tax increase.

DeStefano said, "I think generally people are for service reductions. I think what they have a harder time getting their handle around is eliminating every senior center. ... Going from 10 police districts to four police districts. ... I think it's sort of in the expression of something in the conceptual to how it affects my life, it changes a little bit. Ultimately, the cost savings we're going to accrue are going to be less from reductions in personnel than changes in the way we do things, the way we compensate town employees."

Committee member Alderman Justin Elicker, D-10, asked DeStefano what he would do if he were in the aldermen's shoes.

"I think in the city, it's really important to do two things. Public schools have to work for people, and it's got to be safe for residents," he replied. "I think if you can't do those two things well, you're going to be left with the people who are wealthy and could isolate themselves from every risk ... and the people who have no choice, poor folks."

Contact Lauren Garrison at 203-789-5614.

Reader Comments

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middle class mom wrote on May 6, 2010 7:09 AM:

" Here John the petition is on line we are still getting signatures!

http://www.petitiononline.com/mod_perl/signed.cgi?NewHaven&1 "

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Sunshine wrote on May 6, 2010 7:16 AM:

" Where and when are these small groups of alders meeting on our budget? These meetings should be done in the public eye, not behind closed doors. Let the sunshine in. Publish the meetings and let us observe.

Fact correction Register: The average tax increase is not 8% - it's 9 and that's without reval. When that's figured in, the rate is in the double digits. "

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Resident ID wrote on May 6, 2010 8:10 AM:

" Want to save some \$300,000? This is the cost of this program is crazy. For such a little amount of people who use is program. This out wieghs for the support of a tax increase. This would might save 4 dollars per household. "

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Trevor wrote on May 6, 2010 8:33 AM:

" Typical Democrat talking points when it comes to Budgets and Taxes...First throw in the scare tactics...Cutting Seniors services and Police services...and then for good measure use the word Wealthy people... "

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TRASHCAN wrote on May 6, 2010 9:37 AM:

" HOW MUCH ARE WE STILL SPENDING ON COVETING ILLEGIALS? JOHN YOU'RE A WASTE ! "

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" I can go on 50 different websites all is fine. I come here my computer hard drive starts spinning and get several warning from my computer defense program. This site is looking into peoples computers. " "

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