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New Haven aldermen OK \$471.6M budget; taxpayers face 4% increase

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NEW HAVEN — In one of the toughest economies in recent memories, the Board of Aldermen deliberated for hours Thursday night and eventually approved a \$471.6 million budget.

That budget carries a 4 percent tax increase.

The proposed tax rate of 43.9 mills initially failed to garner the needed two-thirds majority,

temporarily throwing the budget into limbo.

But the tax rate was set at that level on a second vote.

A group of aldermen, led by Darnell Goldson, had devised a plan to reject the tax rate in a last-ditch attempt to stop the 4 percent tax increase, but that plan ultimately failed.

The crowd of more than 150 people consisted mostly of residents and union members opposed to the tax increase. A handful of amendments aimed at further cutting the budget surfaced throughout the night, but failed. The largest was Goldson's proposal to make sweeping cuts across city departments, which would have stopped the tax increase.

"It's time for us to start making the tough cuts," said Goldson, D-30. The amendment failed.

Mayor John DeStefano Jr.'s original budget proposal for fiscal 2010-11 included an 8.8 percent tax increase for homeowners. However, widespread public outrage to the proposed tax increase led DeStefano to work with aldermen to make more cuts and find other sources of revenue. Those revisions ended up cutting the proposed tax increase in half, to 4 percent for the average homeowner. Under the revised budget, the average homeowner would see an increase of \$216 a year to their tax bill.

The aldermen also voted to freeze the phase-in of the 2006 revaluation.

The budget as passed includes a gaping hole of almost \$10 million that is supposed to be filled by a combination of what DeStefano calls "innovative based budgeting" and either parking meter monetization or some alternative revenue generator.

Other cuts in the budget include the much-talked-about elimination of the Fourth of July fireworks and the Christmas tree, as well as bigger-ticket cuts to the school district, Police Department and other offices, affecting services citywide.

While DeStefano in March proposed a \$3 million increase to the Board of Education budget, that increase did not survive additional cuts.

The aldermen Thursday voted to flat-fund the school board and recommend that the cuts target central office and administrative staff, rather than the classroom. The school district is seeking to cut the Talented and Gifted and summer programs.

The school district also will take a hit in its capital budget, with the removal of funds for High School in the Community and Hyde Leadership schools and the renovation of the Helene Grant and Micro Society schools.

The Police Department also faces cuts, including a \$300,000 hit to the \$3.2 million overtime account and a delay in hiring new officers.

Other cuts include reducing the city contribution to Tweed New Haven Regional Airport by \$225,000, Market New Haven by \$27,000 and Pilot Pen by \$13,000. It reduces the Shubert Theater operating agreement by \$10,000. The combined elimination of the Christmas tree, fireworks and city calendar would save \$86,700. There would also be sizable reductions in medical benefits and workers' compensation as well as a reductions in new positions.

Contact Abbe Smith at 203-789-5615.

Reader Comments

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

Dot Khan wrote on May 28, 2010 6:53 AM:

" Why doesn't the article mention the residents wearing Groucho glasses? "

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NH Voter -joe wrote on May 28, 2010 6:59 AM:

" Darnell Goldson had better ideas for balancing the budget than all of those sad incompetent hacks in City Hall. But out of childish spite they obstinately ignored any good advice.
Just hand the community Land Baron another home and the contributions will keep flowing. These out of town Realtors could care not, raise the UI again and the Water again, and let the foreclosure fun begin. The big property owner that does reside owns so much they will not really feel it. "

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Litmus Test wrote on May 28, 2010 7:22 AM:

" The quality of life in New Haven is poor. It seems that those who ignore the already cash-strapped homeowners will not be happy till we go into foreclosure or leave the city; leaving my residence to someone who will purchase it, rent it out to someone who will only add to the crime on my now war-zone street.

I fancy driving through the better neighborhoods (Westville, heading towards rt 34 and near Yale Bowl and Prospect Street area) and think it is safer, cleaner and maybe even worth a tax increase to live there. 4% increase? For what? When will the residents get any increase in the quality of life her? "

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refuse to be a homeowner wrote on May 28, 2010 7:29 AM:

" 43.9 mills? Why would anyone buy property in New Haven? "

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Doyens wrote on May 28, 2010 7:32 AM:

" Goldson challenged the alders to be brave, to show courage in order to vote for additional cuts. Their votes to once again raid our family budgets because they can't do what we do says it all. Meanwhile, it was reported last night that the hiring of more city employees continues...more than \$3 million in new payroll. And Pilot Pen while endlessly telling us what a financial boom the tennis tourney is for New Haven, it was reported last night that it has been shirking its payments to the city. The payments were supposed to come as a share of ticket sales. No payments have been made in some 20 years Goldson says. In contrast, if your tickets or taxes exceed \$100 your car is towed; if you go a couple of

months with a balance in your property tax account, you'll get a letter of a pending foreclosure by the city.

This budget process and the city's finances are surreal. There is a palpable sense of denial and responsibility for our financial health. If this was a drinking or drug problem, somebody would be trying intervention. In the meantime, the spending binge continues including an escalation of expense to run the bloated mayor's office where he manages the managers who manage more managers... "

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BUSTER wrote on May 28, 2010 7:36 AM:

" Picture looks like Lets Make a Deal

Wheres Monty Hall? "

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JHC wrote on May 28, 2010 7:48 AM:

" > Refuse to be a homeowner > Well , Yale can and does buy Homes / Apt.buildings and old businesses , they can convert to Grad student housing etc.
East Rock has a good handful of people who own dozens of condos and homes apiece. (The ole , we have a good bargain for you the buyer , and : We have such a bargain for you the seller. , lets call the whole thing off and i pocket it)
VERY very truthful statement Mr.Doyens

I wonder when appraisals were done ?

This doesn't coincide with the tax bill we get in a couple of weeks does it ?

Oh Yeah , watch your pocketbooks when entering City Hall. The place is overrun with people you would call the police on in an instant . And i usually do as they are the wayward bastarde children of "important" people "

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correction wrote on May 28, 2010 7:50 AM:

" ... We have such a bargain for you the buyer, quite a deal. And we will get the seller the most for their money "

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realist wrote on May 28, 2010 7:53 AM:

" If we really believe that the proposed cuts will play out as reported, we are deceiving ourselves. For example, not hiring new police officers will, without question, lead to an increase in an overtime budget that is supposed to be shrinking by \$300,000. At the end of any given police shift right now, you will hear the dispatcher issue a call for any unit wishing to work overtime. That's because there simply AREN'T ENOUGH officers as it stands right now. People like to malign the police and complain about the money they make, but if we could stop being short-sighted for a moment, we'd realize that crime-ridden neighborhoods where young mothers get shot in the face as they sit at stop signs are harmful to the overall - and not just the physical - health of our city. If I got a chance to go somewhere where I'd

feel my kids were safer, I'd be there in a heartbeat and not paying increased taxes for a decreased quality of life.

Be ready for quality of life issues to take an even lower priority than they do now. Instead of taking four hours to respond to noise complaints, now it'll take eight.

And this is just one example of the smoke and mirrors based budgeting and spending that's going on in New Haven right now. Hear that voters? If you do, make sure your alderperson knows that you're watching and you're tired of the bull! "

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Italian wrote on May 28, 2010 8:05 AM:

" Well someone has to pay for the illegals and lazies in Sanctuary City "

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MARLOWE wrote on May 28, 2010 8:08 AM:

" GOOD WAY TO CLEAM OUT NEW HAVEN AND LET IT BE A WELFARE TOWN. WHAT DO THEY CARE THEY DONT PAY ANYTHING TO LIVE IN NEW HAVEN ANYWAY. GOODBYE NEW HAVEN. "

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slim wrote on May 28, 2010 8:12 AM:

" think about this - my house has a fmv of @275000; i pay 7000 in new haven tax; since i have lived here i have paid in tax more than 2 times what i paid for the house, and for what? the privlidge of living in new haven! to be sure there are parts i will miss but for me the extortion of local govt has ended and i am off to florida where there is no income tax and the property tax is low - on a similar house i would pay @ 3000 "

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Tribe wrote on May 28, 2010 8:14 AM:

" The Board of Aldermen are only pawns of the Mayor King John. Wake up New Haven. Cut the Mayor's staff and save abundle. "

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Just moved wrote on May 28, 2010 8:30 AM:

" Its really a shame. Property taxes are on par with what one would pay for a year's rent. I've lived in Westville for about five years and just bought a house in West Haven. I know the taxes there are high too, but not even in the same ball park as New Haven. Any house in Westville carries a tax bill of at least \$7,000, which, with the still inflated property value, makes it almost impossible for a 100k/year family to buy a house in a safe neighborhood. So, I'm now in the nicest neighborhood one town over. Its tough, many other places (i.e. outside the northeast) require referendrum to increase taxes, I think this is long overdue here. "

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