

November 24, 2009

Council approved the budget for 2010 on November 24 and I want to comment on a couple of things.

First, the \$3 Park & Ride fee – Through a motion put forward by Ward 4 Alderman Bob Hawkesworth, which I seconded, we were able to get that fee eliminated for BRT Park & Ride lots. We had tried to have this fee removed earlier, but failed in our attempts. This time, we were successful so that is a step in the right direction. The pay for parking machines which were scheduled to be installed at the BRT lot in Northern Hills won't be going in now. The elimination of the \$3 fee takes effect immediately and applies to all BRT Park & Ride lots throughout the City.

I also tried to persuade Council to decrease the parking fee at LRT lots from \$3 to \$1. It was a long debate, over an hour, but even though I put that motion forward and Ward 6 Alderman Joe Connelly seconded, we were not successful in getting it passed.

The other thing that I wanted to comment on is the addition of \$2 million for snow removal. The \$2 million, taken from the Fiscal Sustainability Reserve Fund, will fund a 2-year pilot project to hire private contractors to do snow removal and sanding in bad areas within the city, especially in residential areas. That's one million dollars for each of the next two years and it is a one-time project. Council will have to approve the second year of the pilot project during the 2011 budget deliberations. The 311 calls and statistics show where there are difficult areas during heavy snowfalls, where people can't get out of their streets or up hills. The contractors would be hired as supplementary to the City's current snow and ice control policy for snow removal on secondary routes and local priority areas. I think that is a good thing and I supported that expenditure. Over the two years, we will get a good idea of how effective \$1 million a year can be in relieving some of the problems many residents experience year after year.

I also voted in favour of eliminating 125 full-time equivalent positions. Most of these positions had not yet been filled, were seasonal positions or are currently vacant. Regrettably, there are going to be 31 current permanent employees laid off, but in the overall scope of things, with a nearly \$3 billion budget and thousands of employees, this is a relatively small number. But even one is a serious thing for the person getting laid off because in most cases they are paying mortgages and have families to support. Unfortunately, that is what we had to do in this time of economic downturn but at least the City's situation is not as bad as what much of the private sector is facing as far as layoffs.

Something else I voted in favour of was to maintain this year's rates for low income transit passes. The majority of Council voted in favour of this as well, so there won't be an increase for 2010.