



chairman's update

the NEWSLETTER of
DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson

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Budget Update: What's the Secret?

By the end of this month, the Council will have largely concluded its work on the budget for next fiscal year, which begins October 1st. Although the final decision rests with the Council, once again the Mayor has hampered our efforts by withholding information.

The situation is serious enough that I wrote Mayor Bowser May 5th asking that she allow agency directors to release their so-called "enhancement requests." These documents reveal unfunded needs.

The adoption of a fiscal year budget is supposed to be a collaborative process with the Mayor proposing a balanced budget, the Council considering the proposal together with public comment and adopting the budget with revisions, and then the Mayor accepting or rejecting the Council's budget through the enactment process.

Given that it is the Council that adopts the final budget, it is important that the agencies share with the Council their perceived needs. This supporting financial and statistical information ensures that the Council understands the effect of its action when it adopts a fiscal year budget.

I do not understand the justification for muzzling the subordinate agencies by not only refusing to submit the enhancement requests, but even to go further and deny that there were even any requests at variance with the Mayor's budget submission. The Council is handicapped in its ability to adopt an informed budget.

It is for this reason that D.C. Official Code § 47-318.05a requires explicitly that the Mayor provide "Actual copies, not summaries, of all agency budget enhancement requests, including the 'Form B' for all District agencies."

In other words, these are public documents.

I get that information is power, and therefore controlling (withholding) information may be powerful. But that isn't good if the goal is to achieve the best possible budget in the public interest. The Mayor should disclose her agencies' budget requests.

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Constituent Services Corner

The Chairman's monthly "Lunch with Seniors" series proved to be especially valuable for one Ward 4 senior. The Chairman met a resident who complained that the property taxes in the District are not affordable for older residents.

After the Constituent Services team did an investigation on her property taxes, they found out the senior was getting the homestead deduction, but not receiving the senior tax credit.

The woman was given instructions by the Constituent Services team on how to fill out the application to receive the tax credit. As a result, she will be receiving a 50% tax credit on her property taxes for the second half of the tax year due September 2017.

When it comes to helping District residents, our Constituent Services team deserves all the credit.

www.ChairmanMendelson.com

**Contact our
Constituent Services
Team at
(202) 724-8032**



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chairman's update

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Budget Challenges:

As in years past, public education and safety net issues have dominated the discussion.

Although a Mayoral task force recently recommended that the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) be increased 3.5%, the Mayor's proposed budget provides only 1.5%. However, the Administration expects a new collective bargaining agreement will be reached with the Washington Teachers Union, and monies needed for wage increases will be added to the UPSFF.

Many Councilmembers believe this is not enough, and I expect the Council will add even more money. I share the concern that when adjusted for inflation, the public education budget on a per pupil basis has fallen slightly in the past 10 years. Public education is our best tool to ensure equality and opportunity in the long run for all our citizens.

The primary safety net issues are homelessness and affordable housing. The Mayor added over \$10 million for housing to help individuals and families exit homeless shelters. But this increase does not keep pace with her own plan ("Homeward D.C."), adopted in 2015, to reduce homelessness.

I expect the Council will revise the budget in several ways to reduce homelessness: improve TANF benefits so that extremely poor families are less likely to fall into homelessness; establish a "civil Gideon" program that provides counsel to indigent families in landlord/tenant court to stave off evictions; and increase funding for rent vouchers and permanent supportive housing units to increase shelter exits. Each of these would be changes to the budget proposed by the Mayor.

Another challenge is what to do about threats to federal funding in the Trump era. Councilmembers generally agree that there is no easy way to budget for this. Moreover, we have over \$1 billion in our reserves (rainy day fund), and that is available to help should we suddenly be hit with federal cuts.

WMATA needs a substantial increase, funds that would be a new, dedicated revenue. District officials support a regional sales tax. If adopted by Maryland and Virginia, this would enable WMATA to undertake the capital improvements necessary for safety and reliability.

Finally, adopting a budget is only part of the challenge to running government. It is essential that the Mayor spend tax dollars wisely. This year I am especially concerned with how our affordable housing dollars are being wasted. Recently the Washington Post reported that "The D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development was forced to forfeit \$15.8 million in the past three years after repeatedly missing key spending deadlines meant to ensure that federal housing money is properly managed at the local level." And the Mayor wants to spend \$1.6 million to rehabilitate four historic Anacostia houses when there is a community backed alternative that would restore those houses at no cost to the District.

**Upcoming Hearings of
the
Committee of the
Whole**

**Additional Meeting
(Budget
Recommendations
Markup)
May 18, 2017
4 p.m. in Room 500**

**Additional Meeting
(Budget
Recommendations
Markup)
May 30, 2017
10 a.m. in Room 500**

**Legislative Meeting
June 6, 2017
11 a.m. in Room 500**

**Committee of
the Whole Meeting
June 20, 2017
10 a.m. in Room 500**

**To sign up to testify
Contact the Committee
at
(202) 724-8196
Or email
cow@dccouncil.us**