

November/December, 2005

Greetings from your Alder,

Fall has departed and winter has settled onto Madison. We have a beautiful cover of snow and drivers are getting used to snowy roads once again. With winter comes alternate side parking regulations. If you park on a City street, make sure you park on the correct side, whether it has snowed or not. Please remember to drive safely and defensively, as speeding and traffic management continue to be the number one complaint that I receive from 9th District residents. We have had several bad traffic accidents and one near fatality on our neighborhood streets this past year, all of which occurred during good driving conditions. Also, please remember to be careful with fireplaces, holiday lighting, space heaters, candles, and smoking materials. Recently, we had a fatality due to a fire in an apartment in the 9th district. Please make sure that your smoke detectors are in good working order and that you not place yourself or your family at risk due to fires.

This has been a particularly busy fall season for the Common Council. This past month we adopted a capital and operational budget for the City for 2006. In addition to the budget the Council debated a number of significant issues and adopted several important ordinances and resolutions the past several months. Most Council members are looking forward to the holiday season, since we know that we have several important issues facing us this next year.

This year's City budget discussion has been as interesting and intense as any that we have had in the recent past. The State legislature and Governor, as a part of the State budget process, approved a cap on the increase in the local property tax levy of about 4.1%. However, due to technicality, the City of Madison could have been able to increase the property tax levy by more than 7%. Many of my colleagues, and the mayor felt that this was a bad idea, since raising taxes would send a bad message to taxpayers as well as State Government. The mayor's proposed executive budget included an increase in the tax levy of about 3.95%, well below the State mandated limit. The mayor challenged the Council to approve a budget that kept the increase in the tax levy below 4.1%. Ten members of the Common Council (including myself) accepted his challenge and pledged not to vote to approve a budget above 4.1%. Furthermore, we pledged not to vote for amendments that would increase the budget if we did not vote for amendments that would decrease the budget and maintain the 4.1% tax levy increase. After debating and voting on almost 50 proposed amendments to the operational budget, I was disappointed in the final budget that we were asked to approve. I, along with 6 of my colleagues voted against the budget. The City budget passed on a 13 - 7 roll call vote, and the Mayor signed it the following day. Here are some of my assessments of the 2006 City of Madison approved budget, and reasons for me voting against it.

- 1) The budget included total spending of about \$203,000,000.00
- 2) Total spending increased by about 5.5%
- 3) The property tax levy increased by about 4.35%

- 4) Fees (which do not show up on your property tax bill) increased by about 17%
- 5) We transferred about \$500,000.00 from our rainy day fund to the budget.
- 6) We increased funding for Madison Metro by about \$500,000.00 more than requested in the Mayor's executive budget, even though there was no attempt to identify or solve the problems associated with the transit system.
- 7) There were several other proposed amendments that were defeated that could have increased the city budget and raised the tax levy even higher. I voted against these amendments.

On the positive side, there were a several items in the Mayor's executive budget and amendments by the Common Council that are very positive:

- 1) We increased the commissioned strength of the Madison Police Department by 10 officers (4 additional officers added by the Mayor, 2 additional officers converted from civilian positions by the Mayor, and 4 additional officers added by an amendment by the Common Council).
- 2) We will be opening 5 new neighborhood parks in the City (one of which on the far west side of the 9th District)
- 3) We will be opening Fire Station #11 in 2006. This is the first new fire station in Madison in about 25 years.
- 4) We will begin planning for construction of a new Fire Station #12 in 2006. This station will be located in or near the new University Research Park west of CTY M and south of Mineral Point Road in the 9th District.

Some members of the media have referred to our pledge and final vote on the budget as a "gimmick". I do not agree with assessment. I do not believe that this is a good budget. I thought that we could have done much better. I believe that my six colleagues and I have sent a message that we think that we need to be more responsible in preparing a City budget.

There have been several other important issues that the Common Council addressed this past fall. Following are some of the highlights:

The single-stream recycling program officially began in October. There have been a number of problems and issues to work out, but overall the City and its Recycling Coordinator are confident that the new system will be a great benefit for the City, its residents and tax payers, and the environment in the long run. If you are experiencing problems with the new recycling program, please contact me.

The City recently revised its lobbying ordinance. The purpose of this ordinance is to make sure that the public, City politicians, and City staff know who is being paid to influence our decisions on issues that affect them. The revised ordinance helps insure that lobbyists are required to supply appropriate reports in a timely manner, while small businesses or non-profit groups are not burdened with unnecessary and cumbersome reports or penalized for contacting their alder or minor issues.

The State Street Halloween party occurred again this year. This year there were over 400 police and other public safety officers providing safety and securing to this large, unsanctioned, private party. Even though there were no serious injuries, fires, or property damage, Police officers were forced to use pepper spray to disburse the crowd when it got unruly and combative. Once again, City taxpayers provided hundreds of thousands of their property tax dollars to fund the event. Some individuals have claimed that this event was a success, since no one was seriously hurt or there was little property damage. I do not agree with this claim. We continue to spend more than \$500,000.00 a year of public tax dollars to provide safety and security to an unsanctioned, private party. This is a waste of your money, not to mention allowing two potentially dangerous parties to continue without proper controls. I have pledged to work with the Mayor's office, Police Department, and others to change this practice.

Recently, the City approved a refinancing plan for the new Overture Center. The plan allows the Overture Board to maintain operation control, while re-investing about \$100,000,000.00 of the Frautschi gift to pay off the construction costs and provide long term operational funding, with not operational subsidies from the City of Madison. In fact, Jerry Frautschi, the main donor for Overture, has pledged an additional \$7,500,000.00 over three years to help reduce the possibility of an operational subsidy. Under this plan, the Overture Board would maintain control of the facility and be responsible for future improvements and replacements. Some members of the Council favored purchasing the Overture Center for \$1 and making it a City facility. I did not support this proposal, since it would make the City liable for future operational subsidies, future capitol improvements, and it would take away the independence from its board.

This past fall the Common Council twice revisited the recently enacted smoking ban in restaurants and bars. Alder Jen Sanborn proposed reviewing the ordinance, since it has become clear that the total smoking ban in bars is creating a significant hardship on many owners and employees. Many bar owners are claiming that they have lost a significant amount of business and are in danger of going out of business. Many workers in these bars are claiming that their income has dropped dramatically, and that they are losing their jobs or looking for jobs in surrounding communities that do not have a smoking ban. I do not believe that this issue will go away in the near future. As more data comes out about the economic impact of this ban there will be continued pressure on the Common Council to modify the ordinance and there will be pressure on the State Legislature to pass a statewide smoking regulation that would pre-empt the local ordinance. I believe that a state pre-emption of the Madison smoking ordinance could be possible, since the State Legislature and Governor agreed on a raise in the state minimum wage that pre-empted the Madison Minimum Wage Ordinance.

Finally, there are a couple of significant items that the Common Council will be debating in the coming months:

- 1) A local sick leave ordinance that would require business owners who have employees who work within the City limits to provide paid sick leave.

- 2) A keg registration ordinance that would regulate the number of kegs of beer that could be possessed in residential districts (I have sponsored this ordinance.) The purpose of this ordinance is to regulate the amount of alcohol available at unsanctioned house parties and reduce the number of problems associated with over-consumption and underage consumption. One example of these type house parties is currently under investigation by the Police Department. Specifically, there was a Halloween house party near Langdon Street that had approximately 600 attendees.
- 3) I expect a serious debate on the Madison Metro system and mass transit in general in the coming months. Mass transit, and transit systems in general are an important part of our community, and we need to manage them effectively. Traffic management continues to be the number one complaint that I receive from 9th District residents.

Thanks to all of you who have called or e-mailed me with your comments or questions. Please feel free to contact me with questions, and concerns at:

E-Mail: district9@cityofmadison.com
Phone: 829-3425