

A new plan

Mayor and Finance chairman offer proposal to cut Calgary tax hike by three per cent

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Mayor Dave Bronconnier and Ald. Gord Lowe have come up with a plan that would reduce next year's tax increase by three per cent, while maintaining the level of service in the current budget.

When council meets next week to debate the three-year budget, the mayor and Lowe, chairman of the finance committee, will suggest both an infusion of cash from Enmax and removing the money allocated for EMS.

If accepted by council, the moves would reduce the proposed tax increases of 9.6 per cent next year, 6.8 per cent in 2010 and 6.9 per cent in 2011 to 6.8, 6.2 and 6.5.

The mayor's release comes the same day as eight aldermen said they would like to see the entire budget sent back to the drawing board in order to have the rate reduced.

"The seven of us agree we need to listen to the taxpayers," Ald. Ric McIver said of the motion they plan to introduce next week as council begins to debate the budget.

Instead of the proposed increases, the aldermen want city staff to come back with increases closer to municipal inflation. That's about four or five per cent.

As well, the motion would instruct staff to maintain planned increases for emergency services - 242 more police officers, 130 firefighters, 55 paramedics and 30 911 dispatchers.

The seven aldermen who have signed off on the motion are: McIver, Dale Hodges, Jim Stevenson, Ray Jones, Joe Connelly, John Mar and Andre Chabot.

The motion would need eight votes to pass.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart has also expressed support.

The plan being touted by Bronconnier and Lowe would keep all services as proposed, but reduce the tax hike by taking another \$8 million a year from city-owned Enmax.

As well, the city would not include money in the budget for EMS, since the province has pledged to take over the service next spring.



CREDIT: Ted Jacob/Calgary Herald
Mayor Dave Bronconnier during news conference regarding proposed city budget for 2009-2011 at Calgary City Hall.

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