



Monday » November  
17 » 2008

## Council faces budget backlash Hundreds vent at City Hall

**Joel Kom**

Calgary Herald

*Sunday, November 16, 2008*

The crowd surrounding Mayor Dave Bronconnier kept growing as Ken Edmondson grew more emphatic.

"You work for me," said Edmondson, pointing at Bronconnier. "I'm a taxpayer. EMS should never have been in that budget, and you knew that. It's all smoke and mirrors, Dave.

"Calgarians are sick of you as mayor. You're arrogant, controlling and a dictator. The sooner you're out of office, the better this city will be." "Hear, hear!" a few in the gathered crowd cheered.

What was meant to be a question-and-answer affair quickly turned into a venting session Saturday, when hundreds of Calgarians angry over proposed tax hikes confronted local politicians at City Hall.

"We're hearing loud and clear they want it as low as possible for the budget, and at the same time they're saying make sure the spending priorities are correct and don't spend too much," Bronconnier told reporters later.

"Nobody wants to raise taxes but, at the same time, nobody says to get rid of those services.

"They're saying, 'Do it cheaper, make people work for less money.' " Residents cornered Bronconnier and any alderman who showed up, demanding to know why the budget on the table would see property taxes jump 25.1 per cent compounded over three years.

Some quietly shook their heads at the plan that would see the average resident pay \$537 more in municipal property taxes by 2011 than he or she would if the 2008 rate remained unchanged.

Others were more direct.

"This is the worst council I've ever seen. What I want is a recall," grumbled Ron Brown to Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart.

"I can see the taxes going up a bit, they have to," Barry Ferguson said to Bronconnier, "but this is crazy. Take those designer bridges and go and build an overpass, an underpass, where it's desperately needed in this city. It's just common sense." The \$25 million approved for two inner-city pedestrian bridges was a hot topic, even though that project has no impact on people's taxes.

Money for the bridges comes from the capital budget, while the operating budget is the key in setting tax levels.

City managers and politicians offered explanations and views to parry people's queries, but were often cut off from answering by residents who wanted to get things off their chests.

Some people who showed up said it wasn't the hikes that were the issue.

"We are the lowest-taxed city in Canada," said David Hartwick, who brought his eight-year-old daughter, Denika, to City Hall.

"My concern is how they spend it. They could have built a north-central leg of the LRT and it would have served more people than the west leg." Residents brought out everything from home-printed labels ("I live within my means, now it's your turn," read one) to petitions to homemade T-shirts ("If you love freedom thank a vet, if you lost freedom thank a politician").

The biggest lineup was for a petition organized by Colley-Urquhart calling for a one-year budget with an increase closer to inflation. By the end of the day around 975 people had signed their names.

Bronconnier accused Colley-Urquhart of changing her tune.

"The member of city council circulating the petition is the same member of city council that supported all of the spending that's in this budget," he said. "So when you start looking at that, you start to wonder really where are we going as a city council that one day it's OK to spend the money and the next day it's not." Colley-Urquhart, who said the biggest concerns she heard were from seniors, said it was hard to know earlier in the year how everything was adding up to the hikes proposed now.

"You get drawn into approving these reports one at a time, but you have no idea what other departments are going to come forward with and ask for 30 more full-time positions." "It's a fair criticism," she said of Bronconnier's point, "but I've learned my lesson from this flawed process. From now on, I will be voting against all these reports." Calgarians will have a chance once again to make their points on the budget when talks officially open Monday with a public hearing.

jkom@theherald.canwest.com

© The Calgary Herald 2008

CLOSE WINDOW

---

Copyright © 2008 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.  
CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.