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Every bean counts, so we should listen to those who say freeze the raise at Silly Hall ... as for the Cecil sale, the story's just beginning, my friends

By [RICK BELL](#)

Let's see now. How does this arithmetic add up?

Silly Hall now looks for ways to cut spending while aldermen take a 5.5% hike in scratch and scoop up more than \$106,000 a year in base pay and car allowance.

Let's start with the serious and then head to the seriously absurd.

The Sun finds out aldermen will go behind closed doors with municipal bigwigs Feb. 3 to discuss what the downturn means for Silly Hall spending.

"We have a number of different initiatives -- an initial response, a more in-depth response and then what a deep recession would look like," says Chris Good, chief counter of taxpayer beans.

Yesterday, this paper reveals a memo sent by Owen Tobert, the city manager, to his bigwig cohorts and then to those toiling in the trenches.

Tobert outlines the need to plan for tougher times and talks of possible spending cuts and job cuts at the city.

If adjustments are made, some aldermen want them done before the 2009 budget gets the green light in April. You know, the budget where many could not understand how the city would whack them with a sizable tax hike and a big jump in fees, based on spending in a hot, growing economy no longer existing.

Chris says the city is "very much on top" of what's up.

"We are working hard to understand what the implications might be. It's extremely volatile out there. We're trying to be prepared for something and we don't know what that something is," she says.

Meanwhile, back at the trough, the snorting sounds, undisturbed by any nasty noises in the universe.



Yes, city council is gobbling a raise to \$106,340.73 a year.

That is, unless Ald. Andre Chabot, an individual with his head screwed on right, has his way and injects some street sense into the equation.

Andre is no radical. He is not suggesting city council take a vow of poverty. Oh no. Andre proposes the raise for pay and car allowance total a little under \$104,000 instead of a little over \$106,000. That's it.

Is this too much to ask at a time when we could be headed for The Big Ugly?

Andre's brainwave points out, and here comes the fancy-pants lingo, "the current global economic conditions necessitate the need for a proactive approach to cost cutting."

Hey Andre, where did you learn to talk like that? TRANSLATION OF SILLYSPEAK: We're all holding one foul-tasting sandwich and everybody has to take a bite starting with our fearless leaders.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart wants to freeze the dough to last year's level, \$101,287 -- \$91,887 in wages and \$9,400 in car allowance.

Really, there should be no debate. Either Andre's idea or, better still, Diane's design, should fly right through to approval with little argy-bargy Monday. We shall see.

"Let me think about this. The real world is going down. We're going up. Imagine that," says Diane. Sadly, we can.

But you couldn't possibly imagine the spectacle of Mayor Bronco, casting himself as a civic Spiderman as he justifies forking out almost \$11 million in taxpayer dough to buy the Cecil.

Bronco proclaims his own vindication since calls for cops to the Cecil, because there is no bar in the hotel any more, have plummeted. The bad guys are gone.

Well, this columnist can verify the bad guys have left the Cecil. Many of them have moved to the Beltline, from a small corner at downtown's far end to the most densely populated part of the city.

Yes, some of the old Cecil crowd are already checking out their new 'hood, hanging out near a park for kids and a lawn bowling club, sure to be full of seniors come spring. The police are aware of the situation.

Surely, fair is fair and the city plans to now buy up properties affected by the lowlife invasion in an area already enduring more than its share of little law-breaking darlings.

Oops, forgot. This deal wasn't about crime, it was about making the East Village more attractive to developers. Well, at least Bronco and Ald. Druh Farrell, the latte-lifting Queen of Kensington, are happy. Alas, the Beltline's alderman is Little Johnny Mar, who is no doubt busy hunting down plastic bags, and too run off his feet to worry about his constituents getting their heads kicked in or their cars broken into.

You thought we'd reached the end? Not yet, friends.

Yesterday morning, at a meeting of aldermen and citizens looking over the city's budget process, the obvious is treated as if it was the biggest discovery since quantum physics.

John Carpenter, a brainy citizen and accountant, looks at how the city does a budget and suggests when city council starts planning a budget they should look at how much money they want to spend.

Oh really. What a concept. And it begs questions. Why weren't they doing this all along and how many times can we yell "Yikes!" before taxpayers get what's going on?