

November 14, 2008

## 'Speak or hold your peace'

### Calgarians angered by proposed tax hikes urged to swarm open house

By [DOUG MCINTYRE](#), SUN MEDIA

With budget battle lines drawn, aldermen fighting a 25% tax hike over three years hope wallet-battered Calgarians turn out en masse at an open house tomorrow.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, a staunch opponent of the plan that would see an average homeowner fork over an additional \$660 for property taxes and utilities annually by 2011, has taken out an ad in today's Sun urging citizens to air their complaints during the five-hour grill session from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at city hall.

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"I know people are busy and it's a Saturday, their day off, but a show of force by Calgarians would really send a strong message," Colley-Urquhart said.

"I think if there's a poor showing, some will interpret that as meaning this whole thing will blow over and it'll be business as usual and it's anything but."

Outrage has swirled around the 2009-11 budget since its Nov. 6 unveiling, given its calls for compounded tax hikes of 9.6%, 6.8% and 6.9%.

Yesterday, a majority of aldermen said they would oppose the budget, while Mayor Dave Bronconnier offered a slight compromise that would shave the increase to roughly 21% compounded over the three years.

Ald. Joe Connelly said he's pleased about the mayor's proposal yesterday to increase the city's annual Enmax dividend to \$43 million from \$8 million annually, as well as to recognize the city won't need to fund EMS service because of a planned provincial takeover.

Under the proposal offered yesterday by Bronconnier and Ald. Gord Lowe, property tax increases would be 6.8% in 2009, 6.2% in 2010 and 6.5% in 2011.

But Connelly said the cuts don't go far enough to appease the group of eight aldermen who oppose the budget.

They are Connelly, Colley-Urquhart, Andre Chabot, Dale Hodges, Ray Jones, John Mar, Ric McIver and Jim Stevenson.

"I don't think this will placate us -- I think there's still more cuts that can be made," he said,

adding they want the annual property tax increases brought closer in line with the rate of inflation.

The fact the budgeted rate increases far surpass Calgary's 3.7% inflation rate behooves citizens to flood city hall tomorrow, said Scott Hennig, Alberta director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

"People need to realize this is a three-year budget, speak now or forever hold your peace," said Hennig.

"The time is now if people want to have any say whatsoever ... otherwise, we're going to be facing a 25% tax hike over three years and it will just be steamrolled through."

Hennig is also encouraging Calgarians to make their displeasure known at Monday's public hearing, when what's likely to be epic budget deliberations get underway in council chambers.

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#### MAKE YOURSELF HEARD

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