

November 7, 2008

## Proposed city tax increase shows 'arrogant disregard' for Calgarians

By [RICK BELL](#)

Add on six bucks and we'd be at the sign of the beast. How fitting, since we are talking about Silly Hall.

Look at some of the mind-blowing math rolled out yesterday under the watchful eye of Mayor Bronco and his budget boss, Ald. Gord Lowe, aka Bronco with a Beard.

First, consider the estimated hit to the average Calgary household when you add up the city property tax hike, user fee increases and higher utility bills.

Next year, it's about an extra \$288 a year. That's right. \$288.

In 2010, it's that \$288 plus another \$198 for a total jump of \$486.

In 2011, it's that \$486 plus an additional \$174.

In three years time, someone with average digs will see city bills haul in a staggering \$660 a year more than today's tab.

Put in nastier arithmetic, you pay out \$288 more next year and \$486 more in 2010 and then \$660 more in 2011. Looks like \$1,434 less jingle in your jeans over the three years, and, with this outfit, it will just keep climbing.

By the way, the property tax hike is 23.3% over three years if you just add up the numbers but, when the second year of the tax hike is added to the first year and the third year is added to the second year and the first year, the actual percentage when you consider the tax hike on the tax hike is a little over 25%.

Remember there are also more bureaucratic beggar bowls not yet filled so the 25% could go higher.

Now, don't get angry just yet, these smacks are only on the city's half of the property tax bill and for other city services. When the provincial side of the city tax bill kicks in, you can throw in another \$260 or so over the next three years. But that's just ballpark.

Next year, day-to-day spending at the city is up nearly 9% and, where the last three years of doling out taxpayer dough added up to just over \$6 billion, the next three years will tally up to just under \$8 billion.



Then there is the three-year building budget with \$4 billion still to be approved, on top of all the billions in construction already given the thumbs-up and, once things are built, they will need coin from the day-to-day tax dollars to maintain and operate.

Things are so strange downtown these days the aldermen considered real hardliners aren't even asking for cuts to the budget, they just want the climb of cash to be less steep.

For this modest proposal, they're considered big meanies.

And, when some of the elected suggest outside number crunchers look at the budget or members of council propose a one-year budget like other places, they're mocked as penny-pinching cranks by the municipal establishment.

Mayor Bronco does what the Silly Hall paper shufflers of old did to get their way. Tell the people, the end is nigh.

The cops, the firefighters, the world-class paramedics, the buses and the trains, they are all in peril if the folks with their pudgy pinkies on the city cheque-writing machine don't get the taxes they want.

The other smooth move is to tell us taxes could have been much higher but the civic pencil pushers worked so hard to get them to the gouge they are now.

Bronco sees no problem.

"This budget responds to direct needs citizens have asked us to deal with," he says, claiming they've "stripped through the budget," an exercise he calls "very arduous."

He really believes this bunk.

About 2% of the annual hike could be reduced when the province takes over EMS on April 1 next year and Bronco says if he gets what he wants from the province he'd like to see the 2% go down.

Alas, he calls it a "big if" while later asking Premier Ed for more dough again.

And Silly Hall never passed on provincial tax breaks to us before.

Ald. Gord Lowe, who it must be said likes foot bridges over the Bow but is not in favour of high-end designer bridges, defends the hikes.

"I'm satisfied," he says, of the budget, claiming all Silly Hall's needs weren't met.

Bronco with a Beard says aldermen can still oppose the arithmetic and the public can air their outrage. Thanks.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart uses the common sense she acquired in Oyen where she was simply Big Red.

Big Red wants this budget deep-sixed so city council can go back to the drawing board and

get real.

"This budget really, really offends Calgarians," says the alderman, who sounds like she's ready to blow a gasket.

Big Red feels there's a "total disconnect" between Calgarians and the numbskulls fooling with the numbers and showing "an arrogant disregard" for citizens.

"Calgarians will maintain their quality of life if you leave the money in their pockets."

Ald. Ric McIver says city council has "become what we used to despise." They now play the fear card.

Dr. No wants a one-year budget and, as for this wallop to the wallet, he wants a line-by-line once-over to separate the fat from the meat.

"It's long, it's ugly but it works."

Since when did Silly Hall care about what worked?