

November 8, 2008

Outrage greets tax plan

City bombarded with angry calls

By [BILL KAUFMANN](#), SUN MEDIA

City hall is facing a tax revolt it should have known was coming, a city alderman said yesterday as council members were besieged by Calgarians furious about a 25% tax hike over three years.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart said city council will have to sharpen its budget pencils if it hopes to quell the anger of Calgarians facing tax hikes that were unveiled Thursday.

"It's a tax revolt -- people are waking up and I think the people here underestimated the impact the budget would have on them," she said.

Ald. Ric McIver said his office was receiving so many phone calls over the issue "the reception isn't putting them through, they're taking names and numbers."

Seniors -- many of whom live on fixed incomes -- are outraged over the budget they fear will pummel them just as they face other rising fees, costs and the meltdown of their investments in the economic downturn, said Luanne Whitmarsh, CEO of the Kerby Centre.

"I called my alderman and said 'are you insane?' " said Whitmarsh.

"They tell us about how we should cut back when they fund us so the very lecture we get certainly isn't the one they're living by."

Aldermen Joe Ceci and Gord Lowe both defended the proposed budget, saying the notion city politicians can find significant fat to cut is overstated.

"It's defensible in that it's what's required -- those kinds of cuts were done prior to presenting the budget," said Ceci.

Mayor Dave Bronconnier reiterated the need for the province to vacate its 48% portion of the property tax used as an education levy, adding doing so would take a huge bite out of the proposed tax hike.

"It would negate it to a great degree, you don't have to keep going to the province cap-in-hand," said the mayor.



"Most Calgarians are still unaware of the city's silent partner, the province, that camps on almost 50% of their homeowners property taxes."

But Colley-Urquhart said relations between the city and province are so sour that there's no hope of the province giving up its portion of the property tax.

She said spending on such things as \$50 million on pedestrian bridges don't go unnoticed by provincial officials.

And McIver said council members need simply talk to front-line city staff to know there's room to trim fat.

"I talk to employees in different departments who tell me there's lots of wastage, lots of places where we can save money."

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