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## Budget plan blasted

### Some aldermen are ready to fight council's proposed 22% tax increase

By [RICK BELL](#)

Shake your head because you'll be shaking it soon enough.

You know, the old TV show Get Smart had the Cone of Silence. Well, a Cone of Stupidity hangs over the mayor and most of this council.

Not long now, third week next month and Silly Hall will flap their gums over setting a budget for three years. Yes, not one year, three years.

The latest number floating in the civic wonderland is a tax hike in the neighbourhood of 22% over three years. It could go to more like 25% if aldermen get their fantasy items squeezed in the budget.

Of course, the increase wouldn't include a recommended 25% surge in water bills over three years or the new \$48 a year fee on garbage collection, a \$48 not including the \$96-a-year tab for basic recycling.

Crazy. A few blocks away, in the tall towers, busy bee bean counters sharpen their pencils and scissors and put some of their spending on hold until they get a better handle on what's what.

But, at Silly Hall, addition and multiplication is still the only acceptable arithmetic. So they speak of 14% gouges in the first year of the city's new three-year budget and then they talk about it going under double digits. Yes, 9% or maybe 8% the first year, as if that's an achievement.

It's a game, people, reducing make-believe big numbers to make you feel grateful you get a slap in the face rather than a punch to the groin. It is voodoo economics and you are the doll getting stuck with the pin. Thankfully, on a council of 15, there are at least six aldermen not buying the booga-booga and wanting some accounting of where the dough is going.

One lightbulb getting a look is to see a blue-chip panel of bean counters from the real world go over Silly Hall's nasty math and report to the public on what they find.

After all, getting the paper shufflers on the city payroll to do the deed is like asking a beer league hockey team to compete in the NHL.



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Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart pushes another worthy idea. Why have a three-year budget? Why not have a one-year budget this time around, especially given the ugly uncertainty on the street?

Sadly, what is on the street doesn't faze those under the Cone of Stupidity.

"I would have expected a few urgent meetings. Nothing," says Big Red, a nickname she got back in her days in Oyen, where folks have seen the ups and downs.

"There has been a big change in the landscape and Calgary is not immune. A three-year budget doesn't cut it. Once we vote in November the dominoes start falling. We'll be locked in."

Of course, the paper shufflers and some aldermen, those who handle your hard-earned dough with the who-cares attitude of a Monopoly player who wanted to play charades, like us locked in.

"They don't have the desire or attitude to think differently. I never hear anyone say: 'Sorry, we can't afford this item.' It is absolutely foreign. Every sacred cow has to be on the table, and not necessarily milked," says Big Red.

"If there was ever a time to change course, it would be now. It's the wrong time to have more taxes and more utility fees and more user fees and more lot levies."

She wants to examine all building projects. Surely, the designer bridges are toast. Even the Flaky Four aren't that flaky, are they?

Ald. Ric McIver, the Dr. No of previous budgets, doesn't feel as lonely this time around. He pushes his idea to go through the budget with a fine tooth comb, a concept Silly Hall brass think is unthinkable.

"People are hurting. We need to be careful not to make a bad situation worse. This would be a good time to be on the side of the taxpayers."

Imagine that.

The situation is so bad in the Big Blue Box downtown some aldermen have more budget information than others and the ones with the inside info ... golly gee whiz ... are aldermen who like to spend.

Joe the Alderman, aka Joe Connelly, says the good people of his ward would back a tax hike "if there was a level of comfort we cut everywhere we could before we went to the well. But ..."

And wait for it. "But we don't go through that exercise."

And since they don't, without cutting costs where they can be cut, there is no way to get the budget down close to inflation.

"This is the line in the sand. What we do in November we'll have to live with for three

years," says Joe the Alderman, sounding scary, and it isn't Halloween yet.

This column briefly quotes others because readers have asked to know the aldermen with their brains banging on all cylinders.

There are individuals like Rundle Ray Jones, who gets calls from citizens fed up with getting whacked with this and that and the other.

Andre Chabot, also of east Calgary, says the city should take into account what's going on in the economy.

"It will be a dogfight," predicts Joe the Alderman.

Can hardly wait. One hopes the fight will not be all bark and no bite.