

City Council December 17, 2008 Additional Regular Meeting Summary

News Release

December 17, 2008

Contact:

Ronald J. Pursell
Council Chief of Staff
Ph: (504) 658-1082
rjpursell@cityofno.com

[New Orleans
City Council](#)

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)



New Orleans, LA - December 17, 2008 - Today, the majority of the New Orleans City Council chose to override Mayor Nagin's vetoes and keep in place the 2009 budget the Council passed on December 1st - retaining funding for critical public safety needs and important educational programs for the City's children.

The Council also introduced an Ordinance to be addressed on January 8, 2009 which will amend the 2009 Budget partially restoring the Community Disaster Loan (CDL) to a \$5.4 million level.

Budget Committee Chair Councilmember Cynthia Hedge-Morrell said, "The time has come for this Council to ensure a balanced budget and act in the best interest of the citizens of New Orleans. This budget process has been arduous and tedious - but at the end of the day we are united in our 2009 budget course and confident that we have been fiscally responsible on behalf of the citizens of this City."

The budget passed by the Council fully restores \$1.45 Million funding for the Office of the District Attorney and authorizes an additional \$700,000 as originally requested by the District Attorney.

Council President Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson said, "Over the past few days, the Council has worked tirelessly to come to a consensus on this budget. We've come together to ensure the criminal justice system is fully funded, while maintaining a balanced and fiscally responsible budget. I want to particularly recognize Councilmember Hedge-Morrell for her leadership in this endeavor."

The Council's action restores \$1.2 Million funding for the Office of the Indigent Defender and an additional \$500,000 is expected to be generated from the implementation of a fee on red-light tickets. The total funding is expected to be approximately \$1.7 Million.

Council Vice President Arnie Fielkow said, "I am pleased that today the Council passed a fiscally responsible budget which advances the priorities of this City. Most critical was the Council's move today to fully fund the requests of two of our public safety stewards - the Office of the District Attorney and the Office of the Indigent Defender. Additionally, by appropriating \$100,000 for afterschool programming, the Council leveraged \$1 million dollars from the private sector for our children and was able to address the important need for quality afterschool care in New Orleans."

The adopted budget also includes:

- Full restoration of \$100,000 funding for the Aquatics program
- Continuation of de-funding of \$379,000 for the Office of Municipal Investigation appropriating those dollars to the Department of Public Works
- Fully restoration of \$100,000 to the LSU Cooperative Extension Service and \$25,000 to Crimestoppers
- Reduction of the appropriation for "take home" administrative vehicles, exempting first responders. This will save the City a total of \$2 Million Dollars - \$800,000 on Fuel and Maintenance and \$1.2 Million on new car acquisition beyond those needed for public safety. Additionally, there will be no new cars issued without a utilization study excepting public safety. This savings allows the diversion of funds to critical criminal justice and public safety needs as well as provides a funding source of \$500,000 for performance based auditing.

District "C" Councilmember Carter said, "I am proud that the City Council's actions continue to prioritize issues of public safety and further the City's overall recovery."

Sanitation Department

The Council placed 25% of the Sanitation Department's Budget in reserve pending the outcome of the ongoing solid waste collection audit.

The Council encouraged the Mayor to support full funding of \$4 Million of SDT's enhancement sanitation contractual services.

Contractually, it is within the Mayor's power to authorize the enhancement sanitation services for the French Quarter. The Council expressed its hope that the Mayor will agree with the Council and the public to utilize the service provided by SDT under its current contract.

Community Disaster Loans and Reserve Fund Balance

The Council also addressed its previous decision to use the Community Disaster Loans (CDL) and the Reserve Fund Balance, stating that the long-term sustainability of New Orleans is their first priority.

District "A" Councilmember Shelley Midura said, "The Council's actions support the restoration of the CDL to its \$10 million level and leave the reserve fund balance at the fiscally responsible level of eight percent. This Budget also supports programs that this body feels are essential to the safety and operation of the City, especially sanitation service in the French Quarter and funding for the criminal justice system's District Attorney and Public Defender."

Rather than roll-forward the millage, and raise taxes on citizens to balance the budget - as recommended by Mayor Nagin, the Council agreed to reductions to City department budgets.

District "B" Councilmember Stacy Head said, "Government services - or lack thereof - impact most the neediest of New Orleans citizens. It is with this in mind that I have worked to assure that our limited funds are spent efficiently and for the greatest return possible. This Council worked very hard throughout the Budget process to avoid raising taxes and properly fund the most important services."

With the exception of Public Safety, Sanitation and Recreation, the Council agreed to a 5.58% reduction of every City Department's budget. This will save the City slightly over \$4.7 Million. This action will reduce the impact on use of the CDL by more than 50%.

District "E" Councilmember Cynthia Willard-Lewis opposed the override. She explained the rationale for her vote by saying that she wished she had had the option to veto line item by line item. She acknowledged that there were appropriations that the Mayor proposed that she was not completely comfortable supporting. However, there were recommendations by the Mayor that she could support.

She explained that, having served at the State and the City level, she was particularly sensitive to prioritization of essential and critical services to ensure the stabilization and re-development of all of our neighborhoods. Given the choices, she felt she made the best decision possible.

"I selected the position that was less detrimental to City employees, residents of my district and the whole of the City. We owe nothing less to the taxpayers of New Orleans. The recommendations by my colleagues on fiscal cuts will adversely affect employees of City Hall. Those suffering the brunt of departmental cuts will be unclassified employees. Also, during this process, I received communications from residents of the French Quarter suggesting that to maintain their twice-daily trash pick-up, services in my district should be cut back to once a week. This position is totally unacceptable to me," said Councilmember Willard-Lewis.

New Orleans City Council

The New Orleans City Council is the legislative branch of New Orleans City government. The Council considers and enacts all local laws that govern the City of New Orleans. The Council also approves the operating and capital budgets for the City, as recommended by the mayor, and continually monitors revenues and expenditures for local government operations. The City Council is also the regulatory body for public utilities. It also reviews and has final say on many land use and zoning matters, as well as considers major economic development projects for the City. As a Board of Review for Orleans Parish, the Council examines appeals of property tax assessments for real estate taxes, and certifies tax rolls to the Louisiana Tax Commission. Other responsibilities of the Council include overseeing the operation of the public access television in Orleans Parish.

The City Council is comprised of five districts and two councilmembers-at-large. Council President and Councilmember-at-Large Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson; Council Vice-President and Councilmember-at-Large Arnie Fielkow; District "A" Councilmember Shelley Midura; District "B" Councilmember Stacy S. Head; District "C" Councilmember James Carter; District "D" Councilmember Cynthia Hedge-Morrell; and District "E" Councilmember Cynthia Willard-Lewis.