



Ansonia Democratic Town Committee chairman questions transparency of mayor's budget

By **Jean Falbo-Sosnovich**, *New Haven Register*

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ANSONIA >> A public hearing on the city's proposed \$63.6 million budget this week drew no comments on the budget itself, but rather found a former alderman questioning city officials on whether they violated the city charter for failing to keep taxpayers informed.

David Knapp, a former alderman now serving as chairman of the Democratic Town Committee, was one of only two speakers to address the Board of Aldermen during the budget hearing Tuesday.

Knapp said the current administration isn't being transparent enough in letting taxpayers know what's happening with the budget. He questioned whether the budget was published on the city's website or in a local newspaper, and learned that only a legal notice had been published, alerting taxpayers of the hearing and letting them know a copy of the proposal could be viewed at City Hall.

Town Clerk Janet Waugh confirmed that the hearing notice was posted on the city's website and in a local newspaper, but said in an effort to save money, the city opted not to publish a one-page summary in the paper. She said it would cost "\$2,800" to place a full-page ad containing the budget details, whereas the small legal notice cost the city significantly less at \$100.

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Knapp said the city charter, which serves as a blueprint of sorts on how city government should operate, said not publishing the budget shows a lack of transparency, and could also be a "violation of the charter."

"How do you get the taxpayers out if the budget is not posted on the city website or in the paper?" Knapp said. "We need to be a little more transparent. If it's not in the newspaper, if it's not on the website, how are Mr. and Mrs. Taxpayer supposed to review or look at a budget?"

The only other person to speak during Tuesday's hearing was former longtime Planning and Zoning Commission Chairman Bart Flaherty, who wanted to know whether there would be another public hearing prior to aldermen voting on the budget. Flaherty questioned whether the proposed budget was a final document or if more adjustments would be made.

The aldermen's finance committee kicks off a series of workshops this week to discuss the budget requests made by the various city departments. Tweaks and adjustments can be made to the proposal prior to the aldermen voting on a final budget, which has been scheduled for 7 p.m. April 28 at City Hall. The public is expected to be given another opportunity to comment on the proposal prior to the aldermen's vote.

The proposal approved by the city's tax board contains a slight increase to the tax rate, raising it from 37.52 mills to 37.92 mills. Under Mayor David Cassetti's \$63.0 million proposal, the tax rate shows a slight decrease to 37.18 mills, which if approved, would be the third consecutive decrease on Cassetti's watch.

The taxpayers are "first and foremost on my mind, and the tax burden has been too great for too long," said Cassetti.

According to Alderman Lorie Vaccaro, who chairs the aldermen's finance committee, a savings of \$1 million is likely to occur, giving taxpayers a break, under a proposal to combine the health insurance plan for both city and Board of Education employees.

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