



Councilmember Phil Mendelson's

At-Large Update

**Councilmember
Phil Mendelson
(At-Large)**

March 28, 2008

The Proposed FY 2009 Budget

A week ago Mayor Fenty submitted his proposed \$9.4 billion budget for Fiscal Year 2009, which begins this October 1st. The good news is that it holds the line on overall spending – roughly a .7% increase in local fund spending compared to an average amount of 8.6% since fiscal year 2005. However, there is much with the proposed budget to be concerned about.

1. The revenue outlook reflects the slowdown in the national economy.
2. Borrowing continues to grow: long-term debt service will rise to \$507.1 million in FY 2009 and \$582.2 million in FY 2010. We pay more for debt service than for police (\$503.6 million).
3. There is over \$100 million in tax and fee increases. Ambulance fees increase by about 100%, to

raise \$7.2 million.

4. The E-911 tax we pay on our phone bills increases by at least 40% to raise \$3.8 million.
5. Recently adopted small business real property tax relief is repealed, to “save” \$80.7 million.
6. Various other fees are increased, to raise \$15.8 million.
7. Measures are taken to balance the budget that are reminiscent of gimmicks from the past. \$30 million in new revenue is budgeted from stepped up tax compliance enforcement.
8. The settlements and judgments fund (used to pay off lawsuits) spent \$25 million last year, but nothing is budgeted for it in FY 2009.
9. The budget books have the least information in memory, with virtually no narrative explanation about agency spending.

Constituent Services Corner

A District woman called Councilmember Mendelson's office, frustrated because her scheduled move was delayed by the District's failure to get the appropriate Section 8 documents to her new residence on time. More delays by the District would mean that she could lose her current home, fail to be certified for her new home, and become homeless.

Our office immediately contacted the Department of Housing. After investigating, they reported that the paperwork needed to secure her new home had been located and sent to the administrators of Section 8 for processing.

As a result of our intervention, the constituent was approved to move into the new residence and received her key within 48 hours of her first call to our office.

Remember when you feel locked out of the house dealing with the District Government, call Councilmember Mendelson's office. We've got a spare key for you.

Mayor Proposes Steep Increase in Ambulance Fees

The March 21st D.C. Register contained a proposal from the Mayor to double the fees for using EMS. The Mayor will hold a public hearing March 28th on the proposal. The cost to ride an ambulance in a basic life support emergency goes from \$268 to \$530; for advance life support it goes from \$471 to either \$832 or \$953 depending upon how critical the emergency. There will now be an additional mileage fee: \$6.06 per mile traveled. The current fees were adopted not too long ago: 2003. The notice states that the any changes will be adopted as early as April 10th.

The Mayor is not giving enough time for public comment. Typically at least 30 days is provided. Most interestingly, the Council just changed the law (over the Mayor's objection) and in the future the rates can be changed only with Council approval after the Council holds a hearing. Due to Congressional review requirements, however, the new law does not become effective until the end of April.

Street Cleaning Commences

Daytime street cleaning has resumed March 24th, and tickets for infractions will be written beginning Monday, March 31st. For more information, visit dpw.dc.gov. Be sure to find out when your street will be cleaned, and avoid a ticket!



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Real Property Tax Update

Appeal Deadline April 1st

If you question your real property assessment you must mail or file the appeal form no later than Tuesday April 1st. The first-level appeal is very informal and easy and, we're told, roughly 30% of homeowners are successful. If you're unsure what to do, call Celeste Duffie in our office; she'll be happy to answer your questions. Ms. Duffie can be contacted at 724-8137 or via e-mail at cduffie@dccouncil.us.

Earlier this month Councilmember Mendelson held five community workshops across the city to explain and answer questions about property assessments and how to appeal them. We're told by the assessors that ours were the only community meetings this year dealing with assessments.

City-wide, residential assessments went up only about 2.2% this year – far below past years' trends. This year saw additional tax relief as well: the tax rate dropped to 85¢ and the homestead deduction rose to \$64,000. Seniors are still entitled to a 50% credit.

Council Passes Ballpark Public Safety Bill

Recently, the Council voted unanimously to approve the "Ballpark Public Safety Emergency Amendment Act of 2008." Introduced by Councilmember Mendelson, the legislation would put forth a number of provisions that would serve to protect those who are employed by, or attend games at, the new Washington Nationals ballpark in Southeast. The need to pass this legislation on an emergency basis is directly linked to the need to maintain order at the facility beginning opening day.

This legislation amends District law, extending provisions already in place to preserve public order at the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium and the District of Columbia National Guard Armory.

The legislation also provides the Metropolitan Police

Department with authority to establish barriers or restricted zones to control movement in and around the stadium. Further, it prohibits the possession of certain containers within the new ballpark, and criminalizes the unauthorized entry onto the playing field. These provisions help ensure the safety of the public during events at the new ballpark.

"As we gear up for a successful inaugural season at the new ballpark, we must make sure that those who are employed by as well as visit the facility are properly protected," stated Mendelson. "The passage of this legislation is necessary to ensure that safety, and I applaud my colleagues for their unanimous support."

Upcoming Hearings of the Judiciary Committee

Monday, March 31st at 3:00pm

Hearing Room 120

Public Oversight Hearing on:

CA 17-416, MPD Contract with First Vehicle Services

Friday, April 4th at 10:00am

Council Chamber

Budget Oversight Hearing on the:

Department of Corrections, Metropolitan Police Department & Forensics Lab, Office of Unified Communications, and the Attorney General

Tuesday, April 8th at 10:00am

Hearing Room 412

Budget Oversight Hearing on the: Homeland Security & Emergency Management Agency, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Fire & Emergency Medical Services, Office of Administrative Hearings

Tuesday, April 22nd at 10:00am

Hearing Room 412

Budget Oversight Hearing on the:

DC National Guard, Corrections Information Council, Commission on Judicial Disabilities & Tenure, Commission on Judicial Nominations, Sentencing & Criminal Code Revision Commission, Office of Police Complaints, Office of Victims Services, Justice Grants Administration, Criminal Justice Coordinating Council