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FUNKHOUSER'S HALLWAY TESTIMONY **CALLS FOR OPENNESS IN GOVERNMENT**

Before a group of concerned citizens gathered outside of a darkened City Council hearing room, Mayoral Candidate Mark Funkhouser told members of the media Wednesday that the Mayor's \$1.2 billion budget proposal:

- Includes the largest budget increase in recent memory;
- Far too many new employees while the city is encouraging early retirements;
- An alarming doubling of the city's TIF expense in support of developers; and
- About half as much in reserves as a similar budget should.

But perhaps more important than what he said was where he felt compelled to say it – in an echo-filled hallway outside a meeting room on the 10th floor of City Hall.

Funkhouser is building his campaign on the promise of introducing transparency and inclusiveness to a city government that continues to offer very little of either one.

This year's budget approval process is a prime example of how little effort the city makes to find out what the citizens want from their municipal government, Funkhouser said.

Funkhouser said he had expected to make his remarks as part of the regular meeting of the City Council's Finance and Audit Committee meeting. Wednesday's 10:30 a.m. meeting was the first one since the Mayor and City Manager released their budget proposal. It would have been an obvious time to start the budget discussion that culminates on March 22, when the full City Council is expected to approve a budget.

Instead, the members of the Finance and Audit Committee, indeed the whole City Council – five of whom are running for Mayor – seems content to wait until after the Mayoral Primary on February 27, Funkhouser said. That will leave less than a month to analyze, alter and approve a 569-page document that determines everything the city will do for the next year.

Funkhouser said the Mayor's letter to the City Council that accompanied the budget – a letter that tallied multiple "accomplishments" but didn't mention the ballooning TIF outlay -- called it the "principle tool that any Mayor and City Council uses to impact public policy in city government." That is true, Funkhouser acknowledged. Every sidewalk repair, every park renovation, every overtime hour logged by a police officer on a midnight call is paid for through the budget.

Voters thought it was important enough to change the City Charter to allow more hearings to discuss the budget and empower the Finance and Audit Committee to hold budget hearings without the full City Council present.

But the Finance and Audit Committee declined to take the hint, Funkhouser said..

Nor has any city official deigned to make public two other documents that City Council resolutions require city staffers to compile each fall: a five-year financial forecast and a financial condition report. These missing documents would help citizens understand how the current budget proposal fits into the city's current and future financial situation.

Funkhouser said that when he is Mayor such documents will be made easily available to the public, and they will be discussed openly and publicly.

Funkhouser was Kansas City's auditor for 18 years. He teaches college classes on city administration and auditing. He is an internationally recognized expert on auditing and finance. He's written many journal articles and is currently writing a book on the subject. When it comes to the city's budget, Funkhouser believes he might be worth listening to.

Funkhouser said Kansas City is filled with people who are worth listening to, whether they are financial experts with ideas for saving money, or elderly people who would be able to stay in their own homes a little longer if the sidewalk to the grocery store was in better repair.

Funkhouser says he knows that budget hearings in the past have often been sparsely attended. But he said that is no reason to hold fewer. Instead, it should serve as a challenge to find a way to promote these very important hearings.

The City shouldn't offer the minimum amount of openness required by federal and state laws, Funkhouser said. It shouldn't just tolerate citizens who want to make themselves heard.

The City should invite, encourage and welcome its citizens to get involved and participate. And the City should listen to what they have to say.

When Funkhouser is Mayor, it will.

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