

Councilmembers Want To Hear More About Mayor Budget Vetoes

They Challenge Additional Cuts After City Council Approved Budget

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Publisher

At press time, four Long Beach city councilmembers agendized an item for tonight's (September 28) city council meeting to review – and possibly overturn – the additional cuts to the city budget Mayor Bob Foster issued September 19 through his line-item veto authority.

Five days after the city council approved the fiscal year 2010-11 city budget, Foster issued a "veto message" announcing he was cutting an additional one percent from each General Fund department, or \$2.7 million, and nixing the long-planned new harbor administration building.

Councilmembers Patrick O'Donnell, Gerrie Schipske, Rae Gabelich and Steve Neal want to review and discuss the additional cuts at tonight's meeting. In order to stop the cuts, however, councilmembers would have to override the veto with a two-thirds vote, or six councilmembers.

Foster's veto message called for the following:

- Cut \$2.7 million in General Fund spending during the fiscal year beginning October 1 through a one percent reduction in General Fund expenditures including elected officials and public safety. "Within the Police Department and Fire Department budgets, the reduction will be 1% of the non-sworn and overtime costs (\$650,671 and \$54,928, respectively) and a .5% reduction in each department's budgeted overtime costs (\$610,039 and \$337,689 respectively). This action will formalize the City Manager's direction to manage to "99%" of budget in light of uncertainties in revenue in the general fund."

- "\$60.432 million in the Harbor Department's capital outlay budget related to construction of a new administration building. Not only has the Harbor Department committed to seek out less costly office space for their staff but these funds can now be utilized in delivery of the core mission of the Harbor Department. Any costs for the maintenance yard re-location related to the Desmond Bridge re-build can be appropriated through a first quarter budget adjustment reflecting the modified amount brought to the Council."

In agendizing the item, the councilmembers stated: "At no time during the budget deliberations by the full Council or the Budget Oversight Committee did the Mayor express any opposition to the

Council approving appropriations in the amount of his proposed budget. Moreover, city management has indicated to councilmembers that from the time the balanced budget was approved by the City Council, until the Mayor issued his veto five days later, no additional financial figures have been issued indicating that the FY 2011 budget needed to be reduced further."

The city manager's budget was presented to the mayor by July 1, and included significant cuts to General Fund departments and layoffs of up to 200 city staff. The mayor then presented his recommendations to the city council, which occurred July 23. He did not disagree with anything proposed by the city manager. Instead, his proposals focused on pension reform. During the next six weeks, numerous meetings and public hearings were held to review the budget. At no time did Foster state he wanted to see more cuts than had already been planned.

According to a staff report requested by the four councilmembers, the mayor's additional one percent results in the following cuts:

- \$1,260,710 to the police department
- \$392,617 to the fire department
- \$283,956 to public works
- \$247,513 to parks, recreation, marine
- \$123,830 to library services
- \$100,686 to financial services
- \$53,525 to the health department

"The Council and the public need a complete review of why the additional cuts are being made and how the cuts will impact services and jobs," wrote the four councilmembers.

The councilmembers also challenged the mayor on the harbor department cuts:

". . . in the Harbor Department's budget presentation to the City Council on August 24, 2010, the \$60.432 million is specifically identified in the capital improvements as allocated for the Maintenance Yard Relocation. In addition, Port representatives have testified to the City Council that the \$60.432 million does not even cover all of the project costs for the Maintenance Yard Relocation.

"The Mayor has stated that he supports the relocation of the Harbor Department's maintenance yard. However, he has vetoed the entire amount allocated for this project in the budget based on the assumption that a significant portion of the money is for the administration building, which is contrary to the information that was provided to the City Council in the Harbor Department's budget." ■