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Budget redux, on the Agenda, and on the Horizon
 What's happening at



Dear neighbors,

It's been an amazing spring – at least as far as my garden is concerned. Most of my plants are convinced it's mid-June or later. Last week it felt like July. This morning, with temperatures closer to what I think are normal, I'm enjoying a return to Spring.

Last week I spoke with someone who challenged me to think about Ann Arbor's future in a new way – imagine that it's 30 years from now (2032, will you still be here?). Think about Ann Arbor today – your neighborhood, your community. Now think about what you would like to see gone.

As we talked, I said that trying to visualize a future Ann Arbor is like being asked that dreaded interview question – what do you see yourself doing in 5 years? It's much easier to say what you don't want to be doing. (Fill in your own blank here – mowing the lawn, changing the lightbulbs . . .) But once you imagine what you don't want to continue, you can start thinking about how to reach that goal.




So, here's your challenge: Tell me what you want changed in Ann Arbor in 30 years. Sabra.briere@gmail.com Email me your desire – and let's talk about how to reach that goal.

On the budget

On May 21st the Council discussed possible amendments to the City Administrator's budget, and then voted to approve the budget. I'm not up for a comprehensive analysis, but if you are, here's a link to [The Chronicle's coverage](#).

The Council amended the budget, making the following changes:

Program/Activity	Funding Source	Budget Impact plus (minus)
Add 15 th District Court clerical support staff	General Fund	\$76,193
Add Human Services funding (one time)	General Fund	\$46,899
Add Ann Arbor Housing Commission funding (one time)	General Fund (adjusted to cover the cost of retirement benefits newly allocated to the Housing Commission)	\$78,000
Eliminate Recycle Bank	Solid Waste Fund (shows an increase, as elimination of Recycle Bank includes a penalty for ending the contract)	\$3,700

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supplemental funding to Parks budget			General Fund (under a 2006 administrative policy, general fund support for parks will decrease only in concert with the rest of the General Fund budget; the General Fund was not decreased as much due to the amendments. Therefore, the Parks budget needed to be increased.)		(\$49,000)			
Total adjustments to the General Fund					\$152,092			
Total General Fund budget for FY2013					\$79,021,842			
Total budget adjustments					\$155,792			
Total City budget for FY2013					\$483,813,762			

It's difficult to explain why I'm showing a negative number for the fifth (5th) amendment, but I hope this makes sense to you. In past budgets, the City has amended the budget, taking dollars from the General Fund to increase the Parks budget; this year, the Council agreed to consider money allocated to supplement the Golf Courses as money going to support the Parks. That's \$49K more the parks won't get, and \$49K the General Fund won't have to pay out.

There were some amendments that the Council rejected. Most significantly, the Council rejected an option to hire an additional five police officers using General Fund dollars. The Council also rejected the opportunity to reinstate leaf collection. You can ask why.

Why?

Both of these amendments were based on the premise that funds could be removed from a budget without a clear understanding of the impact of those changes. Prior to budget discussions, the staff provided 'budget impact sheets' that let members of Council see which projects and programs were slated for budget changes (from the previous year). Any member of Council could ask about the impact these changes would have on delivering the services you expect. Many members of Council asked; all of us received the responses.

But the amendments just offered a list of departments within funds that the City Administrator should look at for revenue to fund the amendments. Without an understanding (or clear guidance) on what the impact of these changes might be, discussion deteriorated into whether members of Council did or did not support the intent of the amendment.

What the heck does that mean?

Somedays budgets may my head spin, and the words that flow out of my mouth become more complex instead of clearer. Let me try this again. To restore curb-side leaf and holiday tree collection would cost us \$383,000 for equipment (Solid Waste Fund balance) and \$275,280 for annual costs (Solid Waste Fund). The amendment proposed using funds from the recycling, compost and waste collection budget. To hire additional police officers, the amendment recommended cutting various other budgets – such as Public Services (that's streets, sewers, water, trash – and compost collection – what I call Public Works in my mind) and Human Resources (that's the folks who manage the retirement and benefits programs plus help evaluate applicants for jobs). I don't know what the impact would be from asking Public Services to change the budget to reflect altered services to cover \$275,280 in leaf collection and then cutting \$192,265 to support additional police. Unfortunately, neither did anyone else.

On fire staffing

The City has been granted \$642,294 from the SAFER grant program (a Federal program). These dollars are to hire additional fire staff and cover a 2-year period. I've asked the City Administrator whether there will be funds available to keep these new fire fighters on staff after the SAFER grant is finished; he's assured me that he's cautiously optimistic.

One of my nightmare thoughts is that we'd hire folks for two or three years, and then lay them off because we didn't have sufficient funds allocated toward salaries. I really want to avoid that.

On the Agenda

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Ordinances

The Council will consider two ordinances – and there will be public hearings on both.

One is a change in the [water, sewer and stormwater rates](#). My spouse and I are probably not unusual in the amount of water we use – two adults with the usual needs. Our most recent bill and the change that the proposed increase would cause are below:

purpose	old rate	cost	new rate	new cost	difference
water 7 ccf	1.27	8.89	1.31	9.17	\$0.28
water 10 ccf	2.64	26.4	2.74	27.4	\$1.00
Sewer 17ccf	3.34	56.78	3.48	59.16	\$2.38
stormwater discharge 0.04 acres	331	13.24	342	13.68	\$0.44
credit to stormwater (River Safe Home)		-1.3		-1.5	-\$0.20
Total change					\$3.90

For the next year, if this rate increase passes, our family will pay \$3.90 more per quarter, or about \$0.98 more per month.

Note that my house gets credit for being a [River Safe Home](#). We could get a larger stormwater credit if we also used a rain barrel (-\$1.96) or had the City approve our rain garden (-\$3.06). I'm thinking about that official rain garden.

The City Council will also decide whether to [change the responsibility](#) for maintaining sidewalks in the downtown business district. Last year voters approved a millage for sidewalk maintenance; at that time, the DDA accepted responsibility to repair sidewalks. But in the months since that passed the DDA has agreed that the City can do a better job repairing and replacing sidewalks. This ordinance amendment clarifies an agreement between the City and the DDA regarding responsibilities and funding.

Resolutions

Regional Transit:

[The Articles of Incorporation and the 4-party agreement](#)

I was asked to work with County, township, Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor appointed and elected officials (Chris Taylor was the other member of Council) to revise the Articles of Incorporation that the Council will consider on Monday.

Many of us embraced the concept of a significantly enlarged and improved transit system, although the issue of how we would pay for this system has always been unclear. It remains unclear today. But the 4-party Agreement and the Articles of Incorporation allow us to discuss and decide whether to approve funding for the system; they don't initiate anything else. At this time, there's no financial commitment, because the idea hasn't been placed before us as voters.

One of the concerns I've heard expressed about the [proposal](#) is that the current transit system in Ann Arbor is designed to meet the needs of commuters, not neighborhoods. This is absolutely true. But the 5-year plan proposed for the new transit system acknowledges this and tries to address it. It proposes redesigning the transit routes on the west side of Ann Arbor, increasing service on Saturdays, Sundays and evenings, and running buses more often. These solutions sound like what I've been hearing many folks want. (You can find this information on pages 51-58 of the [proposed plan](#).)

Train Station:

There are two resolutions on the Agenda that address the proposed train station. The first is a [resolution to accept a grant from the Federal High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail](#) fund for \$2,806,400. This grant requires a local share of 20%, which brings the total possible expense of [preliminary work](#) up to \$3,508,000.

Work that the City has already completed (since February 17, 2009) counts toward the local share. The City expects to use local funds already expended for conceptual planning, environmental documentation efforts and some preliminary engineering necessary to those tasks, to serve as the local share of this project's funding. Those efforts were funded by the Major Street, Alternative Transportation and Economic Development Funds in the FY10 through FY12 budgets, along with University of Michigan funding, all as previously approved by City Council, with additional funds available, if needed, from the approved FY13 budget.

There's also a resolution to use some of that Federal money (\$196,192) to [amend the contract with SmithGroup JJR](#) to include revising the conceptual plan for the proposed train station. The amendment also funds the completion of the environmental documentation required for the project to meet the restrictions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

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Parks: Braun Natural Area

Braun Natural Area is currently owned by Ann Arbor Township. This resolution, if approved, would [accept the donation of Braun Park](#), which was originally dedicated "to the use of the public" as part of the plat of Washtenaw Hills Estates. The City expects the property to become part of the parks system, and to remain a natural area in conjunction with the Huron Parkway Nature Area.

Art: AAACF funding for Allmendinger Park mural

The Percent for Art program doesn't have a long history of projects, but those projects routinely make the news. One recent effort has been to site murals at various public locations around town, and the Public Art Commission approved a [project at Allmendinger Park](#) to that end. This resolution is to accept \$7,200 from the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation as part of the total \$12,000 needed for the mural project. You can read about the rationale behind this donation here:

<http://annarborchronicle.com/2012/05/29/public-art-commission-works-on-strategic-plan/>

As always, there's more on the agenda than I've highlighted here. If you are interested in the entire agenda, you can follow this [link](#).



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On the Horizon

Main Street/Huron River Corridor study

On Monday, June 4 the Council will approve [nominations](#) to serve on this task force. The mandate for the task force is to 1) by December 31, 2012, provide a recommendation to Council for the best use of 721 N. Main as part of the Allen Creek Greenway trail system; 2) by July 31, 2013, provide a recommendation to Council for the best use of the MichCon site and for safe pedestrian and bike connections from the Main Street area to the Border-to-Border Trail and from the Main Street area to Huron River Drive. The task force will also look for solutions to traffic congestion at Main and Depot.

Street reconstruction and resurfacing

This morning I observed City staff beginning to assess the condition of Jones Drive. Barton Drive will also be assessed over the next week or so. The process for determining which streets need to be resurfaced is annual and ongoing, as conditions can deteriorate rapidly. Please let me know if you are concerned about the condition of streets in your neighborhood; I'll make certain you know what the City staff recommend.

AAPS/AATA/City cooperation

I've been concerned about information sharing and cooperation among AAPS, AATA and the City, especially as the school system contemplates further changes in the level of transportation they provide. If the schools don't provide a bus for children to get to school, the burden for transportation shifts to parents and to the City. Parents

Coffee wakes some of us up

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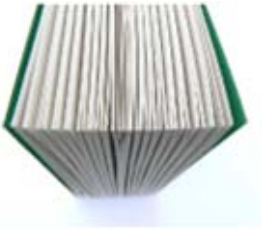
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I hold office hours 7:30 to 9 am on Mondays at the Northside Grill.

While I'm there, I meet with neighbors from all over our community to discuss the issues that concern them -- potholes, parks, trash pickup, construction noise, planning, zoning, City staffing and changes they like or don't like.

The folks at the Northside put up with political talk early in the morning. If you see me there, please wave, and if you have time, please, join me for coffee and a chat.



What am I reading?

From the public library: "*Beautiful, No-Mow Lawns.*" You should check it out.

I continue to read "*The Politics of Urban Runoff*" by Andrew Karvonen and "*Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*" by Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Jeff Speck

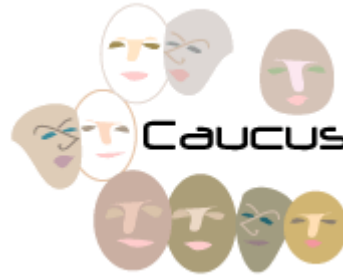
So much to think about.

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may need to drive to schools twice a day – causing congestion, traffic issues, and impacting air quality near schools (yes, really!). The City may need to adjust the services, as well – are street lights ample? Are their safe walkways for children walking to school? Is the snow plowed on those walkways early?

I'm pleased that the school superintendant, Patricia Green, AATA Executive Director, Michael Ford, and City Administrator, Steve Powers – and pertinent staff – are meeting to discuss better ways to plan for changes together.



Caucus

The City Council holds a caucus meeting each Sunday prior to a Council meeting. This meeting is an opportunity for members of Council to discuss agenda items -- and pending issues -- with each other in public view. Members of the public are welcome to attend to bring issues to the attention of Council members. Caucus is held in Council Chambers and starts at 7 pm.

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