



City of Orange Township

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News Release

For Release: Immediate

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Exclusive to Kevin Dilworth:

Statement by Mayor Eldridge Hawkins, Jr. regarding the Municipal Budget

“The budget was introduced in September to meet a legal requirement necessary for Orange to apply for State Extraordinary Aid in the hope of cushioning a tax increase. The budget as introduced is a work in progress. To complete the process we need to know from the State how much money, if any, we will receive.

I totally understand the concern of the Budget Advisory Committee and the City Council. However, our department heads and administration have appeared before them to answer their specific questions and we will continue to give them whatever information they request.

A budget message, as required by statute, was attached the budget as introduced. However I am releasing a more detailed statement before the Council Meeting on Monday to let them know in greater detail my perspective what we are facing.

The bottom line is that most of the increase in our budget is beyond the control of the Mayor, the City Council and the citizens of Orange. The increases reflect among other things increased police and fire operating costs, a doubling of debt service payments on existing debt, continuing unfunded mandates and the impact on revenues of the global economic crisis. The situation is dire and potentially larger deficits can be expected in future years if the state and federal governments are unwilling or unable to do more to help New Jersey’s struggling municipalities.

A large property tax increase would be a terrible thing to impose on the citizens of Orange who are already reeling from the worst financial crisis since the depression. The budget as introduced incorporates the thinking of my administration on how to hold costs down while continuing to protect the safety and health of Orange residents and not damage the quality of life necessary to attract desperately needed new private investment and development.

As the budget process continues, I continue to welcome the involvement of the Budget Advisory Committee, the City Council and the citizens of Orange. I am posting Monday’s budget statement and the budget on our municipal web site along with information about how people can contact me with specific suggestions for budget cuts or increases in revenues. We will carefully consider all reasonable ideas.”

Kevin-

With regard to the Fire Director issue, Mayor Hawkins has asked the Budget Advisory Committee to supply him in writing with any questions regarding the budget that the Chief was unable to answer. They have not yet responded. I am sending the exchange of letters as a separate attachment.

Also, here are some of the things that Mayor Hawkins has done to cut costs. Unfortunately in the larger picture, they won't make a big impact on the tax increase, but every penny that can be saved is helpful. In the form of a quote from the Mayor:

“In my first four months in office, I have already identified and implemented a number of cost-saving measures:

We are in the process of contracting with the REMCS Facility located in UMDNJ in Newark a centralized emergency dispatching facility. This will save us approximately \$150,000 annually in overtime costs. In the future, I intend to continuously evaluate shared service opportunities with other governments where savings can be achieved and the quality of services maintained.

Appointing a new part time City Attorney will permit us to save some of the money that Orange has been spending for legal services. Our City Attorney anticipates a savings of more than \$200,000 over five years. We will continue to look for other opportunities to save taxpayers money by reducing the outsourcing of services.

Utilizing our new Special Police to provide security in our municipal court will save \$50,000 per year.

Cross training our detectives to provide other law enforcement duties has saved approximately \$50,000 since July of this year.

While we must consider reductions in costs and services, we do not have to do so in a manner that is arbitrary, or uncoordinated. I have asked each department to review and re-think their mission statements and formulate a list of goals for delivering services in the upcoming year with less costs than presented in the introduced budget. We are taking a closer look at the full array of services and functions that we perform throughout the year and getting a much clearer perspective of our mandatory and discretionary activities.

These are important savings, but unfortunately small in comparison to the fiscal challenges that we face. Still, every cent counts.”