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FOR INFORMATION CALL

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Common Council Approves Final Piece of 2009 City Budget, Agrees to Push for Part of U.S. \$700B Relief Package

The Milwaukee Common Council today approved an ordinance that puts a “final” stamp on the 2009 city budget, and members present unanimously agreed to petition the state’s Congressional delegation for a chunk of the \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program.

During a special 9:30 a.m. meeting at City Hall, the Council approved an ordinance that revises license and permit fees, parking meter rates and non-moving traffic violation forfeitures that were found to have technical errors (in the original budget action) that provided incorrect revenue estimates. The entire “omnibus” ordinance includes, most notably, an increase in the maximum parking meter rate from \$1 to \$1.50 per hour, and a salary freeze for Council members and the mayor (instead of a scheduled 2.5% increase) effective in May 2009. The vote today on the ordinance was 11 “yes,” two “no” and two “excused.”

The pre-Thanksgiving action concludes the Council’s work on the 2009 budget, which included action yesterday on vetoes from Mayor Tom Barrett. Perhaps most notable Tuesday was the Council’s 13 to 1 (with one excused) vote to override the mayor’s veto of its move to keep firefighter staffing levels at five persons per crew on eight MFD ladder trucks. The Council also voted to sustain the mayor’s veto of a proposed 1% across-the-board cut in operating expenses by every city department except the City Attorney, the City Clerk, the Comptroller, the Treasurer and the Mayor’s Office.

Instead the Council accepted the mayor’s proposed compromise, voting for more than \$380,000 in tax levy reductions for various purposes in five larger city departments/agencies.

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Council Closes Books on 2009 Budget/ADD ONE

Although property assessment calculations are still undetermined for 2009, the final 2009 tax rate approved by the Common Council is \$8.07 per \$1,000 of assessed value – a six-cent increase from the \$8.01 tax rate for 2008. The tax levy increases 4.2% – going from \$227 million in 2008 to \$237 million for 2009. The mayor’s budget called for a levy increase of 4.8%. The new tax levy means that the owner of a \$150,000 home will see a \$9 increase in the city portion of the tax bill, from \$1,201.55 to \$1,210.50.

The other key action today by the Council was approving 13-0 (with two excused) a resolution urging the state’s Congressional delegation to petition the U.S. Treasury Department to allocate a portion of the \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program to cities for infrastructure investment – with the hope that some of that federal “bailout” money could eventually come to Milwaukee and other cities.

The measure approved by the Council also urges the delegation to further advocate for the inclusion of federal funding of municipal public works projects in any future economic stimulus package.

Ald. Jim Bohl, the measure’s author, said it behooves the city to request a portion of the federal money directly – rather than wait for some of the money to be filtered through the state of Wisconsin. “If the money were go to the state first, I fear Milwaukee will not see its fair share,” he said.

“With the new Obama Administration coming on board I believe this is an opportune time to move this (action) forward, because I believe President Obama will be willing to demonstrate a greater commitment to and emphasis on cities,” he said, noting also that the measure received unanimous consent, meaning all 13 members present will be listed as sponsors.

Ald. Michael J. Murphy, chair of the Finance and Personnel Committee, said Tuesday he strongly favors the stimulus efforts in Washington, D.C. and noted the federal money would be well spent as “cities play a vital role in the U.S. economy nurturing economic development and job creation.”

“We could use some of the (federal) money in putting people back to work, which is critical to maintaining the health and wellbeing of our city,” he said.

Ald. Bohl said Milwaukee’s dire need to increase funding for infrastructure investment will be highlighted in a Comptroller’s audit report that’s due out in a matter of weeks. Ald. Bohl, who formally requested the audit, said it’s important for the city to be proactive in informing the state’s Congressional delegation about the depth and breadth of city infrastructure needs.

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Council Closes Books on 2009 Budget/ADD TWO

“We face astronomical funding challenges in terms of upkeep and improvements to our infrastructure, and that will be made clear in the audit report,” said the alderman, who has been given a draft by the Comptroller’s Office. “It’s only sensible and good communication to make sure our representatives in Washington understand the dire situation we’re in how well the funding would be utilized here in the City of Milwaukee, the state’s most valuable urban asset.”

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