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FOR INFORMATION CALL

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Ald. Robert G. Donovan
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Good Idea, But Not Enough Time

Budget Proposal By Ald. Donovan to Train MPD Officers Partly at MATC to Pay For Third Police Class, Retain Firefighters Comes Too Late For 2006

A creative budget initiative that would have allowed the city to put three badly needed classes of police recruits through training for the price of two in the coming year while also saving endangered firefighter positions will not move forward this year, its author said today.

The proposal, unveiled last month by Ald. Robert G. Donovan, would have allowed city police recruits to attend Milwaukee Area Technical College for their first 13 weeks of training, with their tuition paid by the city. The move, which would have saved significant salary costs because the recruits would not go directly to the city safety academy, would have freed up a large enough sum – some \$700,000 – to help cover the cost of restoring 36 vacant firefighter positions slated to be eliminated in the budget.

“It has become painfully apparent to me that the City Attorney and the director of the Department of Employee Relations have several serious questions and issues that need to be addressed before this proposal can move forward,” said Ald. Donovan, chair of the Common Council’s Public Safety Committee. “We haven’t lost this one – we just ran out of time. I am disappointed that we won’t get this done in this budget.”

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Ald. Donovan's Budget Proposal Must Wait/ADD ONE

Ald. Donovan came up with the proposal in response to what he has termed "urgent, emergency needs" in the city's public safety services. The proposal has also been backed by Police Chief Nannette Hegerty, Fire Chief William Wentlandt, members of the Fire & Police Commission, Professional Firefighters Union Local 215 President Greg Gracz, other members of the Common Council, and representatives of several community groups.

The alderman said he remains "fully committed" to bolstering public safety in the City of Milwaukee, and he said he's concerned about Mayor Tom Barrett's effort to eliminate "36 valuable, front-line firefighter positions."

"We're going into a heating season with record fuel costs and neighborhoods filled with old housing stock," said Ald. Donovan. "I fear that it's inevitable we will see increased fire deaths if the positions are eliminated."

The council, Ald. Donovan said, "must continue to think outside the box" when it comes to finding ways to fund vital front-line needs in the city budget.

On a separate topic, Ald. Donovan said he has also come to the conclusion that there is not enough support on the council to put forth a budget amendment for a third police recruit class in 2006. "We just have too many challenges with this (2006) budget," he said. "I'm hopeful the (Barrett) administration will take up the (MATC MPD recruit training proposal) next year."