

## **Hartford City Council Adopts Budget With 7.8% Tax Increase**

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The Hartford city council Tuesday adopted a \$547 million budget for fiscal 2008-09, an increase of about 4 percent, or more than \$21 million, from current spending.

The new spending plan, which represents a \$4.4 million reduction from Mayor Eddie A. Perez's \$552 million proposal, means an increase in the tax levy of 7.8 percent. Most property owners in the city will see an increase in their tax bills, city officials have said.

The new tax rate would be 68.34 mills, an increase of 4.95 mills from the current rate. This means the average annual tax bill for the owner of a single-family home in Hartford will go up \$276, city officials said. Owners of two-family and three-family homes will see larger average annual increases — \$390 and \$503, respectively.

The spending plan was approved after limited discussion, with eight council members voting in favor, and one — Veronica Airey-Wilson — abstaining.

The budget incorporates the school's \$284 million general fund budget, of which the city is responsible for \$93 million. The balance comes from the state.

Working with Perez, the council found ways to cut from his initial budget proposal. The reduction comes largely from eliminating 29 vacant city positions worth \$1.5 million — a few from virtually every department — as well as delaying filling 11 other vacant positions, officials said. No municipal employees would lose their jobs as a result of this budget

The council and Perez also found \$1.3 million in smaller non-personnel reductions in almost every department, such as travel expenses, copying costs, and dues and subscriptions, city officials said. They also reduced the estimated cost of health benefits by \$969,000 by not filling an existing deficit in the account.

The budget still includes extra money for the school system, 30 new recruits for the police department and continued debt service payments for the construction of schools, libraries and a new public safety complex. The city still anticipates some cost savings from last year by hiring 50 new firefighters, more than offsetting that cost by a projected reduction in overtime for the department.

The budget includes an additional \$500,000 for the city's library, keeping the library level with its current spending of \$8.4 million. It also restores the city's \$60,000 contribution to the Greater Hartford Literacy Council.

The \$21 million increase in the budget is driven largely by fixed costs, such as debt service payments and employee benefits, which will increase from this year by \$6.7 million and \$3.6 million, respectively.

The city will also pay \$1.3 million for a new recruit class of 30 police officers and give an additional \$5 million to the city's schools, an amount to be added to the additional \$7.9 million in educational cost-sharing grant money from the state.

The city is also seeing a \$340,000 increase for insurance coverage. And it will pay a total of \$2.7 million in increases to convert the city's computer accounting system to a new program; to pay for increased utility costs; and to cover costs associated with higher tipping fees paid to the Connecticut Resources Recovery Authority.

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