

City Budget for 2008 Strengthens Law Enforcement and Infrastructure

May 2008

Dear Editor:

The City of Columbia will hold a public hearing on our 2008 budget Wednesday June 4th at 9:00am at City Hall. We will have first reading on June 4th and final reading on June 18, 2008. We would invite all citizens to attend and participate. The City Council has held six budget work sessions to fully understand budget and explore ways of cutting expenses. We have reviewed every department to see where the needs are and to explore reductions.

This year's budget concentrates on increasing our Police and Fire Department Budget. Starting this year the City will fund a \$2.5 million Pay and Retention Plan for our police and fire. This plan will be phased in over three years. Additionally, we will fund an additional 14 police officers. Seven will be added this year and seven next year. The budget includes twenty four police vehicles and a fire ladder engine. The City is committed to making Columbia the safest City possible. The City is funding our Anti-Gang Initiative and the Together We Can effort to support Project One. These funding proposals are essential in giving Police Chief Tandy Carter the tools that he and the Department need in the fight against crime.

Other significant budget items include, significant park renovation funding; implementation of our energy audit and efforts to make Columbia a greener more efficient City; and monies to operate our winter shelter for the homeless again this year.

The City is also committed to continuing to improve our infrastructure. The budget includes over \$100 million in water and sewer capital improvements program for system upgrades, expansion, fire hydrants improvements and the treatment plant upgrades. We have started the twelve mile forty eight inch water pipe to Northeast Columbia to insure we can deliver enough water to that fast growing area, and we are making substantial improvements and repairs to our existing sewer and water lines. Additionally, we are in the second year of implementing a study of our water and sewer system by Black & Veatch to reduce the indirect cost a location from the water and sewer

fund to the general fund. That study also recommended a rate increase of five percent for this year. The City of Columbia has been in the water and sewer business for over one hundred years. Some parts of our infrastructure are aging. However, each year we budget for upgrades and expansions.

The budget has a proposed millage increase of 3.8 mills. State law only allows cities to raise millage by population growth and inflation. This change in State law basically gives a city or county to opportunity to keep up with growth and inflation. If a local government does not raise the millage rate for growth and inflation, then it is barred from ever raising the millage rate to account for the growth and inflation for that year.

Columbia is going through the greatest renaissance in our history. Innovista and the Bull Street Neighborhood will transform our City and our economy. The heart of Columbia from Downtown, and Five Points to Read Street has been revitalized. Private investment, both residential and commercial, has exploded. We have stronger neighborhoods with more residents, more homeowners, and greater home values in Columbia. We have achieved this growth with a commitment to diversity and inclusion. Our proposed budget invests in law enforcement, basic services and our infrastructure.

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