



A New Approach for the City of Tampa

The property tax debate in the state legislature over the past several months has resulted in a new tax structure for local governments. The new tax law will result in less revenue, property owners will pay less in taxes, and services will need to be re-evaluated.

Local governments have been reliant on continued growth in their tax base to continue to fund services. Some services are basic in nature; others have developed over time and serve to enhance the quality of life. While being mindful of budgeting in a prudent manner, we have had the ability to add these services because of revenue growth.

It has been a major priority of this administration to make our city government more efficient and to institute savings wherever possible. However, these new legislative changes result in significantly less property tax revenue going forward. City budgets will need to be re-evaluated to meet the new limitations. So, as any business would do, we have looked at the reality of less revenue versus the services we provide with a fresh approach. This necessitated making some very tough choices.

There will be cuts in services. Every program we offer has a customer base. All of the administrative cuts throughout the organization will have a cumulative impact on productivity. All cuts mean something to the organization and to our citizens.

But we have to balance the services we offer with what the taxpayers are willing to pay. People want to pay less in property taxes and I understand the need to revamp our property tax structure. We responded by re-evaluating our organization. We exist as a city government for only one reason – to serve the public. Our first concern is that our customers, the taxpayers, still receive the basic services they pay for and have a right to expect. There are other quality-of-life services that are important to many in our community although not all may consider them completely essential. Other services may serve a relatively small number of people and could be cut out or diminished without having major impact on the community at large.

Our cuts have been across the board. We have cut managers and supervisors, eliminated most of the deputy director positions, and one department director position.

We started our fresh look at the city's budget by evaluating the fundamental way many departments are organized and staffed. We looked at each layer of management – deputy directors, managers and supervisors. We looked at professional level staff and administrative support staffing. We asked the question of each department director – could you provide nearly the same level of service with less management or administrative support? In almost every case, the answer was yes. Maybe response time might be a little slower or some level of service currently being provided will not be provided in the future. But generally, the work of the city can move forward with less administrative support.



Our first and top priority in city government is public safety.

My message to the Police and Fire Chiefs has been clear – no cuts that reduce the number of police officers or firefighters on the street.

The Police Chief has provided cuts to his civilian staffing and 13 sworn positions that perform administrative functions. The highest rank affected is a Major – the other affected officers will leave their administrative work posts and be assigned work back in the districts. His plan is a sensible one and will not in any way affect response time for citizens or the level of police protection citizens currently receive.

There are few cuts to the Fire Department. The reality is that we need to continue to add new firefighters each year. The only cuts in the Fire Department are administrative in nature.

Because the Parks and Recreation Department is so large and includes multiple programs, we turned to it for the greatest number of cutbacks. It is a wonderful department and provides so many great recreational programs to young and old alike. Again, we asked the question, could you organize differently to reduce the management level? The answer was yes. Then we looked at programs. All programming is positive and for the good. But, we have to prioritize our programming dollars for this year and the future. The cuts we have made impact only a small part of the many services provided by this department. Every program affected definitely has its customer base. But I hope the customers will recognize that the cutbacks are a necessary part of our reducing the range of services offered in order to reduce the budget and that the core mission of the Parks and Recreation Department has not been affected.

Overall we have eliminated 219 positions in our General Fund, which is supported by property taxes. Of those positions, 99 were vacant but unfortunately 120 people have been informed today that they will be laid off. Another 14 vacant positions in our Enterprise Funds (Parking, Water and Wastewater) have been eliminated. While Enterprise Fund services are not funded through property tax dollars I think it is important for greater efficiencies to occur throughout the organization for the benefit of user fee payers. **These positions will continue to be funded through September 29, 2007 in order to provide each employee with three months notice. Further our Human Resources Department will assist employees in finding other employment.**

Focusing only on the General Fund – this action will bring our total number of employees in the General Fund from 3,669 to 3,450 – a 6% reduction. Also eliminated were 32 part-time positions and 101 seasonal positions. The total dollar amount saved in the General Fund for all personnel cuts is \$14 million.



I want to stress that we have not made these job cuts lightly. Each of these employees has played an important role in providing services to the public. The elimination of their position in no way reflects negatively on their job performance or the importance of their work.

But a new approach had to be adopted. If we know we have less revenue to work with in the future then we must shrink the size of our government. If we are going to continue to invest in neighborhoods, which I consider a high priority, and add firefighters and new fire stations, which I also consider a high priority, we must reduce overall the management, supervisory and administrative support functions of government and carefully prioritize the services we provide.

This is a significant number of positions being eliminated. But next year, and in the years thereafter, we will be in a better position to deal with small or flat revenue growth or even a sharp economic downturn.

We will continue to work to shrink the size of city government through attrition. As vacancies occur, we will evaluate the positions to determine if it can be eliminated or restructured to achieve further reductions in employee costs.

These cutbacks represent tough choices that have had to be made given our new financial reality. I believe that we have kept faith with the people we serve – re-evaluating our government and saving millions of tax dollars without affecting basic services.

Mayor Pam Iorio
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