

Matt,

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me on my concerns on this coming Tuesday night's City Council budget meeting. I believe that my issues are genuine and reasonable, but I know that I am going to have to plead my case well, or they are toast. Per your request, I am inclosing a brief summary below. Any feedback that you or any of your friends have would be greatly appreciated, even if they are critical.

Our current property tax rate is .617875 per \$100 of evaluation. Property tax appraisals dropped by approximately \$234 million, thereby reducing revenue to the City by around \$2.2 million. In an honest attempt to hold the tax rate, Council has targeted certain fees for increase, with a good portion applying to non-residents utilizing City services, such as the Tennis Center. I consider these to be reasonable and rational given the current economic environment.

Seven open positions have been frozen in this budget, including a Civil Engineer and a City Planner. There is an exposure here, given our projected increased activity due to TOD development related to the opening of the DART stations next year.

Eight positions are targeted for elimination; although two of the positions are part time and together count as only one full time person (FTE). One eliminated position is for a Code Enforcement Officer. CEO's insure that our restaurants meet health code requirements, helps neighborhoods insure that their neighbors' homes are kept up to code standards and do not drive down home values, as well as other targeted businesses that sometimes add to the degradation of sections of our City. With our commitment to preventing blight, is this wise?

Other significant cuts include the closing of the Thomas Center Pool, a delayed opening of the newly decorated Crosby Road Recreation Center, and the elimination of our Summer Camp programs. My concern is that this removes a significant number of healthy activity options for our youth, and fear that the alternatives are not good for either the youth or our City. Idle minds tend to lead to mischief, either as instigators,

participants, or as victims. I doubt that our police officers are going to welcome the additional "opportunities".

Besides the monthly statistics that I receive on criminal activity in our City, I also frequently hear from our Citizens about observed/experienced neighborhood crimes. We have had a Crime Review meeting at the Josey Ranch Library recently, and have had numerous emails and other communications with concerns about not only the increase in incidents, but also in the time it takes for a police officer to arrive after the reporting. Assurances have been given that everything possible is being done, but I think it is time to revisit that commitment; and here is why.

Since 2007, burglaries have increased 23.9% and robberies have increased 34.8%. While some say that an increase in police on the street would do little to make a difference, I totally disagree. I believe that an increased presence does make a difference, and will most definitely lower the amount of time it takes to arrive at the crime location. When you home or car is violated, it should not take 45-60 minutes for an officer to arrive because they have been on other calls. Additional officers on the street will definitely make a difference. Additional officers in the office would also allow more attention given to cases, so that we can get a few more of them solved and remove future threats, at least from the captured bad guys.

Words of commitment to reduce the rising tide of burglaries, robberies, etc. are great, but would not a commitment of resources be more truthful?

The currently proposed budget, due to the reduction in appraisals, is actually a tax decrease even though the tax rate stays the same. Impact to the City is the ending of important activities that help keep kids off the street, and does absolutely nothing to slow the escalating crime rate on burglaries and robberies, and reduces code enforcement resources that have a direct impact on our home values. Slum lords and absentee landlords will love this option, both from a reduction in taxes and a reduction in code inspections and follow up. One alternative is to increase the tax rate 1.4 cent to restore total tax revenues to the 2008-09

level. We could, with this option, keep the Thomas Pool open, open the recreation center on time in February, and even keep the Summer Camp programs if we so desire. With the retained increase in fees and other reductions, we could target dollars for additional police, including maybe the creation of a gang unit, graffiti removal and investigation to get it stopped, etc. The main downside here is that our CFO and other economic experts predict a continuing downturn, and that another increase next year is almost inevitable. My recommendation is to implement a 2.8 tax rate increase. This would have all of the advantage of the 1.4 cent option, but would also allow us to create a contingency reserve for the unexpected, take advantage of TOD development opportunities, and position ourselves against a tax increase next year. While this could not absolutely guarantee against an increase next year, it would guarantee that if one is needed due to an economic calamity, at the least it would reduce the impact. I believe that it would position us to not need one. What would be the impact to homeowners of the 2.8 cent increase? For the average Carrollton home (\$179,914), the post homestead exemption amount of \$143,832 at the new tax rate of .645875 the increase would be \$40.10 per year, or \$3.34 per month. \$3.34 is approximately equal to:

- A Big Mac sandwich, and about half what a Big Mac meal costs
- Half a pack of cigarettes
- Grande latte at Starbucks (a venti costs more)
- Three Lotto tickets without the multiplier option

And what would we taxpayers receive?

- Increased funds for Public Safety; additional officers, possible gang unit, graffiti abatement
- Retain level of Code Enforcement officers, and position City to add resources if need arises
- Retain the Thomas Pool
- Open the Crosby Road Recreation Center as scheduled

- Remove additional library closures from the backup options list
- Remove city employee furloughs from the backup options list
- Remove Tennis Center closures from the backup options list
- Remove Senior Center closures from the backup options list
- And one of the most important options of all is that the City would be prepared. There should be no wild scrambling at midyear if, and probably when, sales tax projections fall and immediate further reductions are needed.

In summary, we need a budget that better addresses our growing public safety concerns, critical services, and basic quality of life issues that make Carrollton the great city that it is. Bargain basement attention to our needs is negligence when for the price of a fancy cup of coffee we can better address our concerns and negative exposures, and allow us to be prepared for almost any reasonable situation that arises.

Whether anyone agrees or not, I welcome input. My email address is [ron.branson@cityofcarrollton.com](mailto:ron.branson@cityofcarrollton.com), and my office phone is 972 466-3319. It is also easy to let your Council members know how you feel by going through the city website at [www.cityofcarrollton.com](http://www.cityofcarrollton.com).

I think Citizens should demand that we elected officials do more than just promise action. You can help by letting us know that you support action, and that you support the acquisition of the resources to do the job that we promise.

If you do agree with me, take a few minutes and let your council members know. Pass this information to your friends and neighbors know that to keep our City safe and clean, that the price of a cup of coffee is very very cheap indeed. You can also voice your opinion, either pro or con, at Tuesday night's Council meeting. The work session begins at 5:45 P.M. and will probably begin budget discussions around 6:15 or 6:30 in the larger Council Chambers. Visitors will be allowed to speak on the budget during the Public Hearing which will begin no earlier than 7:00 P.M.

Whatever your position, thank you for taking the time to review this information.

Ron Branson

Mayor – City of Carrollton