



From Councilman Steve Mandel

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Yes, to a Great Holiday!

December 8, 2009

While we are struggling to realign government and still provide services needed for the community, I give thanks for the great town we live in and all the people that are willing to help others.

It is nice to step back from the grind of business and just enjoy this time of peace. Please enjoy yourselves and remember to shop and dine in Highland Park to help our local economy. See you in 2010.....**Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah!!!**

No to Proposed 2010 Budget !

December 8, 2009

Even though staff has cut the budget in a very significant manner, there is still much more to do. I will not support the proposed budget for 2010 because **I still do not see a near term commitment from staff or the majority of the City Council to balance revenues and expenditures.** I will also not support a tax levy that exceeds the property tax cap of .1% and increases the sewer fees attached to our water bill. I am not supporting any further burdens on our citizens that are struggling in this economy. **Bottom Line----Less government, more money in citizens' pockets.....**

In 2010 staff is proposing that about 3/4 of a million be taken out of reserves to balance the budget. . This deficit spending must stop. Along with this budget gap we will be reducing infrastructure work 700k. We have to convince staff and the City Council that a smaller government can survive the current economic environment and will still serve our citizens just fine.

Last night at the 11th hour our City Manager came forward with approximately 800 k of additional proposed cuts in our expenditures. I felt it was along time coming but an extremely welcome surprise. Still, we could not get a majority of the Council to pursue even a portion of the cuts at this time. The good news however is that most of the Council was willing to look at these cuts during the 2010 fiscal year.

While we hope for the best in the coming months, we must plan for flat revenues and reconstruct our government services accordingly. This will take hard decision making and a real commitment from the City Council to keep our City Manager on this task. Since this is a very complex set of decisions it will be easy to cloud the issues at hand. We must stand strong and do what is right for our citizens that are struggling to make ends meet.

Is the City Council Serious about being Green?

November 29, 2009

In 2001 we passed a master plan for Highland Park that had many sustainable and environmentally friendly visions that were suppose to be implemented by changing our city code. **Through the following year in 2002 we changed our land use ordinances to reduce our built structure density throughout the city by increasing open space requirements and reducing the amount of units that could be built.**

In the master plan we also said we were going to change zoning on government owned property so

that it could only be used for open space and government uses. By changing this law we would provide a public process to allow much more dialog if the school district would decide to sell property for home or commercial development when they need cash. Most if not all of these properties were dedicated just for open space and school use.

Also in the 2001 master plan we envisioned an open space district to preserve the 1000's of acres currently used by private clubs along the Skokie River Corridor. We need to push Councilman Levenfeld who is the Plan Commission liaison and Mayor Michael Belsky our leader, to get these proposals out of the holding pattern and implemented soon. **Plenty of talk about being green..... BUT every time** I get these discussions back on the table a majority of the City Council and Staff find reasons to send it back to the shelf. **This will continue until the City Council really wants to move these basic green elements forward.**

We currently have talked about lot coverage regulations that would limit the amount of land that could be covered by cement and structures thus reducing flooding potential..... NO! NO!, we must wait and study some more said a majority of the City Council. This after 2 years of public meetings initiated by the City Council and unanimous approval of the Plan Commission, Environmental Commission, and the Lakefront Commission. I have seen so much smoke and mirrors it is amazing. Council People just say how you feel!!! BUILD BUILD BUILD BUILD!!!!

My Friends, don't be fooled by green wash. Water Conservation, Sustainable stormwater ordinances and practices, open space designation, Solar designs and energy conservation, geothermal promotions for HVAC, and strategies for green grants at state and federal levels just never seem to get off the ground with this government.

I have been trying to work with this Council for many years now to continue our leadership on "being green" in this community... BUT continue to meet brick walls and derailment. I really think we need to all get ready for a new wave of overdevelopment in the name of sustainability and economics.

No Free Health Insurance for future Councils.

November 3, 2009

Currently the City Council and Treasurer get free cost health insurance when we are in office. We also get a year of additional health insurance for every year we serve. So like in the case of myself, I have 20 additional years of medical insurance due me from the Council Benefit package after after I finish my current term. This policy was instituted many years prior to me being elected in 1993. For myself and others that have accrued future years of coverage under the current policy, the liability for the city will exist until those accrued years expire. These are benefits already earned and due for past and current service.

What the Mayor and the City Council can legally change is the future Council benefit policy for those elected in 2011 and beyond. I am advocating that we change the benefit policy for future City Council and Treasurer starting on May 2011 and not offer FREE medical coverage anymore. The savings over the next 10 years would be about 3.5 million dollars for our future budgets starting in 2011.

I floated this idea at our budget meeting November 2nd and was immediately challenged by a Councilman in an attempt to intimidate me from moving forward on this issue. But Councilman, our job is to promote best practices on this City Council for the best interest of the Community and I will not be deterred from doing what is right. During the past election this issue was brought up at the coffees I attended. At those meetings I had committed to vote to rescind this benefit package for future City Councils. I think the current costs of medical coverage far exceeds the original intent of this benefit for the City Council.

Councilwoman Olian further suggested we could individually refuse coverage that is due to us currently and in the future. **I think this is also a great idea for those who want to personally make an immediate impact and I applaud her for giving up her insurance, but only legislative action can stop future Councils from receiving this benefit.....** I myself had other primary medical insurance for the first 12 years I served on the City Council. I challenge Councilwoman Olian to match my practice and follow through on her initiative. **We will be discussing the issue of benefits to the City Council** in the 1st quarter of 2010. Get ready for a fight on this one from a City Council that wont give up future benefit packages easily. **I will support eliminating free medical insurance for Councilman elected in 2011 and beyond.**

During these tough economic times we need to initiate change now and change the government structure for the future. I asked in November that this be brought forward in 2010 for discussion and implementation in 2011.

No to Video Gaming in HP

October 27, 2009

The City Council voted to prohibit video gambling in Highland Park. I thought this vote was a no brainer since I have not spoken to anyone that would want to see any gambling in our restaurants. If people want to gamble they have many opportunities on the boats or across the border at casinos.

New Dog Ordinance passes at Council

October 27, 2009

We have travelled from a very unpopular "Pit Bull" breed ban proposal to a very well vetted updating of our dog ordinance. This ordinance was discussed at several public hearings and took in comments from animal experts, state lawmakers, citizens, and dog owners from all over the country.

I think our staff did a great job taking a non-starting point of a breed specific ban and turning their efforts to a fair ordinance that does protect not only the citizens from vicious and dangerous dogs but also protects dogs from bad owners and other dogs that are aggressive .

In dealing with dogs we still must use reason on how we approach and communicate with them. We can't expect dogs to be smarter and more understanding than PEOPLE.... or can we? RUFF!

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A copy of our report filed with the State Board of Elections and the county clerk is (or will be) available for purchase from the State Board of Elections, Springfield, Illinois, or from the county clerk County Building, 18 N. County St., Waukegan, IL 60085

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