

Clifton Journal  
2/20/15

## Televise City budget meetings

Did you know this Council held its first budget meeting last Saturday morning at 9 a.m. and the meeting wasn't televised? Nor was the meeting taped to be shown at a later date. After a long hard week dealing with the snow and working, how many residents were free at 9 a.m. on Saturday morning?

It is time Clifton starts using the \$1 million in franchise fees it collects from Cablevision and Verizon to support our cable TV station instead of putting this money into the general fund. Time and time again we hear certain Council members preach about transparency, yet none voted to televise the budget meetings when I suggested it well over a year ago. Actions speak louder than words.

At this meeting, our CFO introduced the 2015 budget with a 5 tax point increase or \$2.5 million. Imagine 5 tax points - no matter if you have a small, average or large house - none of us can afford this. Remember, this doesn't include the school or county tax increases. No wonder this Council doesn't want the budget meetings televised.

The saving grace is we finally have a city manager who is suggesting ways to cut this budget and realizes residents can't afford tax increases like this (probably because unlike our CFO he lives in Clifton). The city manager pro-

vided a three-year history of actual spending in categories like "other expenses." He suggested this year's budget figure be based on the average actual spending over the last three years rather than a figure based on the inflated amount budgeted the previous year. Sound familiar?

For four years I said that budgeting should be based on the prior year's spending and the other expense category could easily be cut by over \$1 million (or 2 tax points). Unfortunately, it fell on deaf ears.

Each department has a category called "other expenses" for things like office supplies, other equipment, subscriptions, miscellaneous expenses, consulting services and advertising expenses - nothing that would affect the quality of our emergency services. For example, if a department's "other expense" category was budgeted at \$100,000 but at year end this department spent only \$20,000, the next year's budget number was set at least \$100,000, sometimes a higher number. Therefore, the budget was inflated by at least \$80,000 for just this one department.

Imagine this happening for each and every department. Remember, expenses in last year's budget were overstated by \$2.5 million.

Thankfully we finally have a city manager that realizes the citizens of Clifton deserve a fair and balanced budget and simply can not afford this kind of tax increase.

I urge this Council to vote to televise these budget meetings. We the people of Clifton have a right to hear and see what is going on. This is why public access television was set up. Each and every Council meeting must be shown on TV.

Mary Sadrakula

CLIFTON JOURNAL Clifton  
2.20.2015