

**Mayor's column for
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“If you elect me, I’ll cut the fat out of the budget, I’ll increase services, and I’ll keep your taxes down.”

During the campaign season for City Council, I always am amused and bemused by statements that candidates make. Typically, these are by challengers, not incumbents. The job performance of the incumbent has little to do with them seldom making these types of statements; it’s just plain old-fashioned experience that kicks in. Once elected to the Council, it becomes apparent to a new member that there isn’t any fat to cut, you can’t reduce taxes in today’s political world (nor can you increase them), and it’s a struggle to maintain services let alone increase them.

In the days before tax-limiting initiatives, when property taxes could be increased up to six percent a year, a city councilmember actually could keep our property taxes at a lower level. Nowadays, with property tax increases capped at a one-percent increase by law, the effect that a city council has on property taxes is minimal. Consequently, there isn’t any way to increase services from a particular department either, without cutting services somewhere else because, you guessed it, you can’t raise taxes!

I’ve said it before, but it bears repeating, the City of Edmonds brings in a little more than \$10 million a year from property taxes. In the 2005 approved city budget we will spend \$14 million alone on police and fire services. Somehow, we have to come up with another \$4 million in addition to property taxes just to pay for our police and fire departments, then another \$14 million to balance the budget. Those added dollars have to come from fees, sales taxes, and other governmental sources.

So, when a candidate comes knocking on your door and tells you that they are going to reduce your taxes and increase your services, ask them how they are going to do it. I’d love to hear their answers.