

Mayor's column for
The Enterprise
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The Edmonds City Council held their annual retreat on the weekend of February 1 and 2. Staff presentations took all of Friday as we focused on the City's financial future. We wanted to be clear that the Council was on the same page as staff, with the understanding of where we are headed financially and the importance of new revenue streams.

Since 2000, and the passage of revenue-reducing initiatives by the voters, we have made many budget cuts and staff reductions in an effort to balance a budget that is subject to a "no win" situation. By "no win" I refer to the fact that inflation, and therefore expenses, are going up annually at a three- to four-percent level, and revenues only at a two- to three-percent level. Property taxes increases are limited by law to one percent annually; so, as you can see, expenses continue to outstrip revenues every year.

The "cash on hand" that we rely on to pay our monthly bills is trending downward rapidly, and we went to the Council to show them the dilemma and to ask for their guidance about some new ideas that we have been working on to create more revenue. The Council listened and acted on each of our requests. Some of the ideas will come to the Council very quickly; others will require further study and refinement by staff before reporting back to Council. We were very pleased with the Council's response to our report.

The first order of business for staff is to begin preparations for an Emergency Medical Services (EMS) levy submittal to the voters. It's been a number of years since we have gone to the voters to ask for support for this valuable and necessary service. The cost of providing it has been subsidized by the general fund, and consequently, some other city services have suffered from that reallocation of funds. EMS levies will never totally pay for the service provided, but we have a responsibility to make sure that we align funding sources as best we can in this tough environment.

As staff performed a year-long study of how we do business, we found some efficiencies that will make us more productive, and we are looking at every available option to provide services to the residents of Edmonds in an environment where revenues are scarce. We have identified close to \$500,000 in budget reductions that will appear in the upcoming budget deliberations for the 2009-2010 budget.

Staff will continue to work with the City Council as we leave no stone unturned in our quest to balance the upcoming budget.