

Manchester should prepare for the spending storm

Another View Tammy Simmons

IN 2016, a majority of aldermen voted to bust the Manchester's spending cap by approving a police contract with a precedent-setting 18 percent pay raise in it. When it was time for the firefighters to ask for their 13 percent raise, Chief Dan Goonan warned: "Because of the decision that was made by this board, we're back here again. I don't blame (the police department,) and we're not the only ones that are going to be here. Waterworks is coming. Highway is coming. They're all coming."

Former Mayor Ted Gatsas vetoed the police contract because it created a \$3.95 million shortfall. The aldermen then overrode his veto. Gatsas also vetoed the firefighters' 13 percent pay increase because even Chief Goonan admitted his budget lacked funds to cover the increase and he would have to depend on contingency money or lay off firefighters. City employees' salaries are not "a contingency" and aldermen shouldn't approve contracts that are unsustainable under that department's current budget.

In response to denying firefighters that 13 percent raise, the chief threatened to close a fire station. That's your fire station — you paid for it. There is no secret pot of gold at the end of the rainbow that these funds come from. They come from you — from your property tax bill — whether you can afford it or not.

And don't forget: "They're all coming." They are coming for more of your money whether you can afford it or not.

Manchester is at a budget crossroads. We pay an ever-increasing amount of property taxes. In the 20 years since I bought my first home on Parker Street, my property taxes have increased 74 percent. That means my neighbors' taxes also went up. Generally, we see no increase in city services for these increases. Snow doesn't get plowed faster or more often. Trash still gets picked up once a week. The school budget increases by millions each year despite educating thousands fewer students than even a decade ago. Now we're adding 'hazard pay' for certain jobs that have always been considered hazardous.

Increases in spending have become the norm. If and when anyone votes against an increase, some say they instead made cuts. That's not how math works. If the cost today is \$1, and the proposed increase to \$1.25 is

In 2008, I organized the collection of thousands of signatures of Manchester voters for a spending and tax cap. After a legal battle, Manchester voted to limit spending and tax increases to no more than the rate of inflation. Still, some aldermen continue to ignore what you, the voters, wanted.

Last November, voters chose Joyce Craig for mayor. Mayor Gatsas is no longer there to veto aldermen when they vote for contracts that would result in layoffs because the budget can't sustain the cost of the increases. Mayor Gatsas isn't there to stop aldermen when they vote to ignore the voter-imposed tax and spending caps.

Instead, we have Joyce Craig — who was endorsed by the Manchester Police Patrolman's Association, Manchester Association of Police Supervisors, Manchester Association of Fire Supervisors, Manchester Professional Fire Fighters, and Manchester Education Association — to be the stop gap when spending and taxes grow faster than the rate of inflation. Call me a cynic, but I have my doubts that Mayor Craig has the taxpayers' backs.

I want city employees to be compensated well. The approach that whichever union gets in line first, gets the raise is ridiculous and incredibly unfair to every employee in line behind them. Instead of promising more than we have, we should determine what we have and can afford and only then, allocate pay increases to all of our departments, not just some.

City residents, and city employees, complain that the aldermen play favorites by passing out sweet deals to their kids, brothers, and cousins who work for the city. Sure, the city charter is supposed to prohibit such actions, but that doesn't stop them. Violating the city charter needs to end. Yarger-Decker and automatic annual merit increases for all employees need to end. We need fiscal restraint and solid ethics back at City Hall.

Remember Chief Goonan's words. "We're not the only ones that are going to be here. Waterworks is coming. Highway is coming. They're all coming."

The spending storm is coming, and we have been warned.

reduced to \$1.05 — that’s not a cut, that’s still an increase. It’s still more money coming out of your family’s budget.

This begs to ask, “Who’s looking out for you?”

Tammy Simmons is chairman of the Manchester Republican Committee.