



# UNDERDOG LAW REPORT to the Renton City Council Mon, May 19, 2014

This report started two weeks ago when I noticed an article in the Renton Reporter which indicated Mayor Denis Law's budget had a serious problem—he had a shortfall of \$8 million. Then the next week Mayor Law's Finance Department got a "prestigious award" for its excellence in finance reporting. It struck me as ludicrous. The Finance Department can't come up with a budget that doesn't have a hole in it, but it gets an award?

That then led me to do some further checking in the Renton Reporter and I came up with a series of headline articles (pages follow, please read) which paint a sad picture of how Mayor Law is managing the city finances.

I showed these articles at the May 5, 2014, council meeting. Jay Covington defended the budget by saying it was balanced. At the end of the meeting, Mayor Law invited me to make an appointment for training regarding Balanced Budget 101.

No thanks, if a balanced budget contains a \$10 million or an \$8 million or a \$5 million shortfall (depends on which article you read and what timeframe). I don't want that kind of balanced budget; and I do not think the citizens of Renton want that kind of balanced budget either. We are already taxed enough, and we are sick of over-development and the problems this causes.

If Mayor Law's budget was \$457 million and it was \$10 million short, then he should have reduced the budget to \$447 million and prioritized. Fire Department and Police Department first, roads and sidewalks next, and Parks last. A new library could wait. And an expenditure like the "lollipop artwork" at the south end of Rainier, well, that was a real waste of money. And the "tubular tampons" at the drug store end of Rainier aren't any better.

We need a mayor who will run the city budget like we MUST run our family finances. We can't continue, year after year, to use debt to balance our family budgets—common sense tells us this will be a disaster in the end. It will be disastrous for the city too. Chasing property tax dollars to try to cover the shortfall is one reason why developers appear to have a free hand—drain water where they want, dig foundation holes without a permit, cut down trees that should be saved, and a whole host of things about which Claudia Donnelly reports frequently. (We need more Claudias.).



**Take common sense pills as needed  
to create a truly balanced budget**

editorial comment from Inez PETERSEN, J.D.  
206-339-8210, <http://underdoglaw.info>



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**Inez's editorial comment:** The fire chief got it right--he's concerned, Denis Law isn't. Mayor Denis Law is OK with a budget that is \$5 million short for the 2 years. He says it is a "balanced budget" and mocked Inez at the council meeting on 5/19/14 because she refused to make an appointment for his Balanced Budget 101 course. Where are his priorities when he lets the fire department budget sit there half a million short? and the entire city budget \$10 million short? See Renton Reporter article dated 10/16/2013, "Mayor Law proposed \$457 million budget, some fee, rate increases." Some?

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## Fire chief 'very concerned' about 2014 budget



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by **BRIAN BECKLEY**, Renton Reporter Editor  
Nov 1, 2013 at 1:19PM

Despite bright spots in the city's economic forecast and budget, there is one department in Renton that is facing the potential of a budget crunch next year.

**According to Fire Chief Mark Peterson, his department could be looking at a gap of approximately \$500,000 in the 2014 ledger.**

"I'm very concerned," Peterson said this week.

Peterson said his department is facing the funding shortage primarily because more than 10 percent of his 155-person department is injured or on light duty, meaning other firefighters and emergency personnel are being paid overtime to "backfill" those shifts.

"We try not to shut down equipment," Peterson said.

According to Peterson, the Renton Fire Department is slowly but surely getting older and "key parts" such as shoulders, knees, hips and especially backs can get hurt just doing the job.

Peterson refers to police and firefighters as "occupational athletes" because of the amount of physical activity required on the job, which can be taxing. He said 78 percent of the calls to which the department responds are not fire, but emergency calls and many of those can involve the lifting of patients who do not necessarily fall in places that are easily accessible or allow proper lifting technique. Because of that, injuries can occur.

Peterson also cites a change to firefighter pension plans that occurred in the late 70s. Under those rules, health insurance becomes the responsibility of the firefighter after he or she retires, which Peterson said has added to people staying on the job longer.

On top of that, the 2008 recession hit the department relatively hard as well, lowering assessed valuation and hindering building and development in the city right at a time when



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**Inez editorial comment:** So Mayor Law has a \$10 million short fall for his 2-year budget of \$457 million, what is the answer? Prioritize and cut \$10 million out of the buget to make a \$447 million dollar budget. We have to budget that way in our families, why not at city hall too?

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## Mayor Law proposes \$457 million budget, some fee, rate increases



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by [DEAN RADFORD](#), Renton Reporter Reporter  
Oct 16, 2012 at 11:53AM

Renton's economic picture has brightened, but Mayor Denis Law's two-year budget proposal for the city he presented Monday is still facing a \$10 million revenue shortfall that will mean staff cuts, some rate increases and other cost-saving measures.

Law's overall city budget for 2013 and 2014 totals \$457 million, with \$202 million going to pay for the basic operations of the city, such as police, fire, **parks** and street repair.

The City Council will begin its deliberations on Law's budget at a Committee of the Whole meeting at 5 p.m. Oct. 22 at City Hall.

**The \$5 million project shortfall in each of the two years** is due to the increasing cost of doing the city's business, according to Law.

In opening [his budget address to the City Council](#), Law said the city has addressed many of the challenges brought on by the Great Recession, including significant



Mayor Denis Law — Image Credit:



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**<-- Parks should be last priority if the budget is \$10 million in the hole.**



## Renton City Council to consider budget Monday night; read the documents

**Inez's editorial comment:** One of Mayor Law's ideas is the \$600 charge mentioned below. A very bad idea that did not fly.

By [DEAN RADFORD](#)

Renton Reporter Reporter

November 26, 2012 · Updated 3:49 PM

0 Comments

The Renton City Council is nearing completion of its deliberations for the \$457 million city budget for 2013 and 2014.

Tonight (Monday, Nov. 26), the public will have a chance to comment on the budget at the council's meeting at 7 p.m. in its council chambers. Also Monday night the council will have the first reading of resolutions related to the biennial budget adoption.

The council is expected to finalize the budget on Dec. 3. The council meets on the seventh floor of City Hall.

Prior to its regular meeting, the council, meeting as the Committee of the Whole, at 6 p.m. will discuss water fluoridation.

Mayor Denis Law presented his budget proposal to the council in October. It came with a \$10 million revenue shortfall that will mean staff cuts, some rate increases and other cost-saving measures.

One possible new source of revenue is a \$600 charge for patient transport by city fire crews to a hospital.

The charge, which would be billed to an insurance carrier and not the patient, would raise about \$325,000 a year for the general fund, under city estimates.

Firefighters filled the City Council chambers last week to raise objections to the new charge, pointing out transport is a service they now provide for free and the money wouldn't necessarily go to fire services.

"It will not do anything for the fire department," said Mark dos Remedios, who is president of the Renton IAFF Local 864.

But Jay Covington, the city's chief administrative officer, points out that the fire department is funded from the general fund, which is supported by a number of revenue sources. That's an advantage for the fire department, if one particular source falls short of forecast.

Here are the major resolutions and ordinances related to the budget:

- [Fee schedule](#)
- [Basic life support transport fee](#)
- [2013 property tax](#)
- [2013 utility tax rates](#)
- [2013-2014 biennial budget](#)



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**Inez's editorial comment:** According to Mayor Law, a balanced budget is required by law, even if it is \$8 million in the hole. He says I should know this because I'm a lawyer. Somehow the common sense part of me says Renton needs a budget that isn't \$8 million in the whole.

And then note how Jay Covington passes the ball to the Council like they should have the answer. But wait, read the next article about the "prestigious financial reporting award." Something is wrong with this picture. Shouldn't Mayor Law's Finance Department should be able to solve the problem?

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# City facing potential \$8 million budget hole by 2018

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Apr 11, 2014 at 1:22PM

Despite positive signs that the city is coming out of the Great Recession, there's even larger financial troubles ahead on the horizon unless something is done now.

That was the message during a discussion on financial sustainability Monday at the City Council's Committee of the Whole meeting in which administration officials told the City Council that they need to make a decision this year to avoid a deficit of \$8 million by 2018.

"We're going to need direction from you soon," said City Administrator Jay Covington.

Renton administration officials are recommending the council investigate a local Business and Occupation tax on businesses, pursue a Fire Authority/Fire Benefit Charge option and put together a capital package to send to voters as soon as possible to prevent what Covington called "Major changes in how we deliver services."

Administrative Services Administrator Iwen Wang began the discussion with the good news, telling the council that the city finally appeared to be back where it was prior to the recession hitting in late 2007.

"Renton's economy is actually improving," she said. "Overall, the community is doing better."

According to Wang, taxable sales in the city are now back to where they were in 2008 after a several-year dip. In addition, residential building permits, though nowhere near their early 2000s peak, have shown growth back to 2008 levels and Renton's unemployment rate has dropped from a high of 9.2 percent in 2009 to 4.53 percent in 2013.

Wang also detailed city efforts during the recession, including a cumulative reduction in city staffing of more than 101 positions since 2009, or 13.2 percent.



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**Inez's editorial comment:** "This award is a testament to the city's focus on innovation, efficiency and improved productivity." And about that \$8 million or \$10 million shortfall--forget it. This certificate of excellence is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reports . . . Is this not ludicrous? Publicize a huge budget shortfall for 2 years as shown by the Renton Reporter articles in this report and then get a reward for excellence. Again, the emperor is wearing no clothes.

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# City of Renton wins prestigious financial reporting award



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Apr 18, 2014 at 9:00AM

The Certificate of Achievement in Financial Reporting has been awarded to the City of Renton by the Government Finance Officers' Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) for its comprehensive annual financial report (CAFR).

The Certificate of Excellence is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management.

"This award is a testament to the city's focus on innovation, efficiency and improved productivity," said Iwen Wang, Administrative Services administrator. "Our staff does an outstanding job with this complex report and we are pleased that they continue to be recognized for their efforts."

The CAFR is judged by an impartial panel to meet the highest standards of the program including demonstrating a constructive "spirit of full disclosure" to clearly communicate its financial story and motivate potential users and user groups to read the CAFR.

The GFOA is a non-profit professional association serving approximately 17,500 government finance professionals with offices in Chicago and Washington, D.C.



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**Inez's editorial comment: AND THE EMPORER IS WEARING NO CLOTHES.**

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## Mayor calls state of city 'strong' in optimistic speech



Mayor Denis Law delivers the State of the City March 13. — Image Credit: Brian Beckley, Renton Reporter

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by [BRIAN BECKLEY](#), Renton Reporter Editor  
Mar 19, 2014 at 5:52PM



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