

Milwaukee Common Council President Johnson: Getting closer to better financial health, more stable housing, and improved public health and safety

Posted on Tuesday, Sep 21, 2021

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Statement of Common Council President Cavalier Johnson

September 21, 2021

Today Mayor Barrett presented his 2022 proposed budget to the Common Council and to the residents of Milwaukee. The Barrett Administration put together a budget that speaks to the difficult decisions that leaders make in trying to balance the needs of an entire city. However, with difficult decisions there are compromises. As the President of the Common Council, I look forward to helping our great city reach its full potential through transformative leadership that prioritizes financial stability, public safety, and the health of our communities.

We need to stop drawing down on our reserves if we want to avoid cutting city services substantially in the next few years. Though the 2022 budget draws less on reserves than previous budgets, it still dips into our savings intended to lessen the burden on taxpayers and keep the city financially healthy. In order to ensure the maintenance of city services we must build up our reserves — not deplete them. The City must solve our intractable structural financial imbalances, a problem that the current administration has not been able to resolve. We must partner with legislative leaders in Madison to fix this together.

Fiscal responsibility now shows our state legislators that we aren't looking for a bailout; We want a long-term partnership which allows Milwaukee to continue to fuel economic development statewide.

We must also solve the lawlessness and crime on our streets that is traumatizing our neighborhoods. Residents deserve to feel safe and I want all children to grow up in neighborhoods free from random gunshots and daily reckless driving. In order to make our city safer for those we love, we need multi-pronged, strategic investments in public safety. Law enforcement is a part of that equation, both sworn and unsworn personnel. I sponsored a file which passed today providing \$1.1 million in funding to the Milwaukee Police department to expand the work of the Traffic Safety Unit (TSU) ensuring safe streets for all and \$6 million for Department of Public Works engineering solutions to promote safe driving which was unanimously sponsored by all members of the Common Council.

I participated in a ride-along with the officers of the TSU last week and saw first-hand just how critical their work is in ensuring safe neighborhoods. I also support the use of unarmed Community Service Officers (CSO) to include reckless driving outreach and mitigation and bringing CSO staffing up to previously budgeted amounts. Another key strategy to combatting crime is to ensure that residents have access to mental health care with dignity. As such, I sponsored in last year's budget a measure to have clinicians respond along-side law enforcement officers to increase accessibility of care for those in need.

Additionally, today we also passed a measure I sponsored that will provide critically needed funding to the Milwaukee Fire Department (MFD) to help augment emergency medical response costs for ambulance services (services that include advanced life support), and additional funding for private ambulance companies that are helping us maintain full coverage across the city.

This is not just any budget cycle: This year the Common Council will simultaneously be debating how to allocate close to \$180 million in the first round of federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. My vision for this investment is ensuring long-term financial health, increasing access to affordable housing and home ownership, and taking transformative steps toward eradicating Milwaukee's lead crisis. Partnering with colleagues, we sponsored a 'right to counsel' measure (passed by the Council today) to provide preliminary investment in eviction prevention through access to legal representation for residents facing eviction, and evidence-based intervention keeping more residents in their homes and without an

eviction record.

These priorities necessitate bold leadership to move Milwaukee forward. We are at an inflection point for the future of this city and it is paramount that we invest wisely now to guarantee the City's financial health, public health and safety, as well as stable housing access.