

From: [S Mason](#)
 To: [Rebecca Noecker](#)
 CC: ["St Paul Council-Council"](#)
 Subject: Budget - Back to Basics - Decrease the Levy
 Date: Wednesday, November 27, 2024 1:35:22 PM
 Attachments: [Insight St. Paul's 10-29-24 Report to St Pauls Elected Officials & Citizens.pdf](#)
[Classroom.pdf](#)
[Exec Summary.pdf](#)
[Guiding Principles for Fiscal Responsibility Final Draft 10-23-24.pdf](#)
[UNCLASS 4.png](#)

Councilmember Noecker –

Greetings, St Paul needs a “Back to Basics” approach to, well, everything, but especially when it comes to the budget, and especially now, in light of the report provided by In\$ight St Paul. I know you will have heard of the report and I hope you have read and studied it. (Attached here in case you want a refresher.)

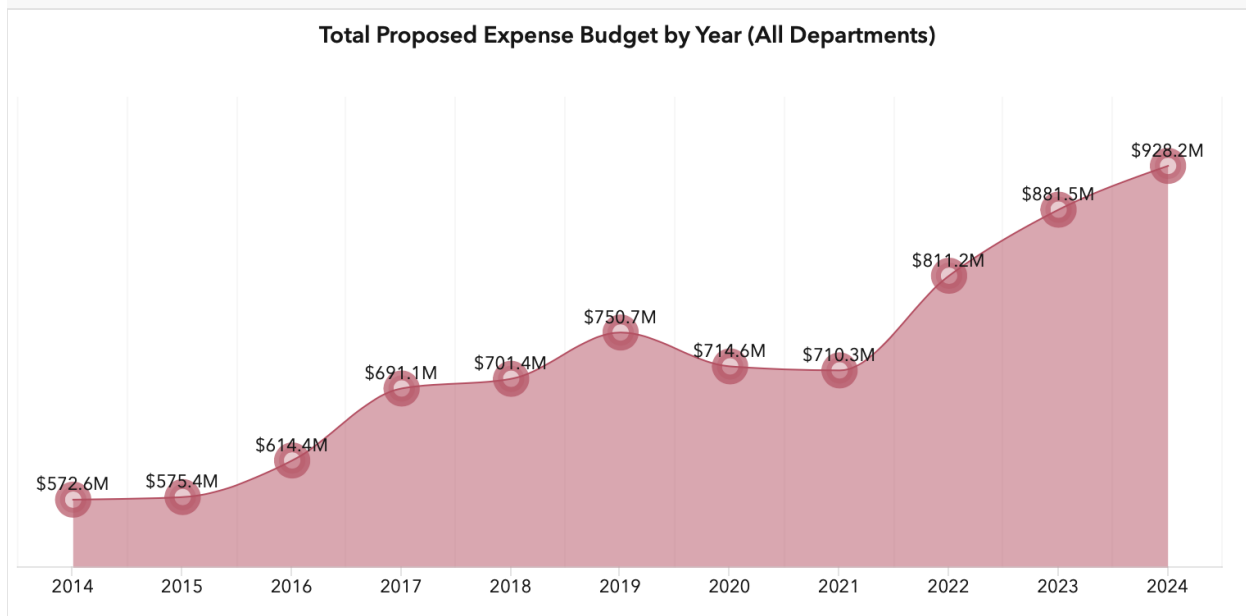
To everyone I’ve talked to, it is an unbiased, fair assessment of the out-of-control spending St Paul has experienced in recent years. It’s downright frightening. There is a sense of genuine fear among neighbors, and many, many longtime residents are talking about leaving. It’s not just that we have the highest taxes of any City in the state – which might be understandable if the services provided were also high. But it’s the opposite. If we don’t stop this wasteful spending now, the problems facing St Paul will continue in a downward spiral, and soon be past the point of no return – if we’re not there already.

I’ve also included a graph of the growth over the last decade in city budget from Open Budget on stpaul.gov—the expense budget has ballooned from 572.6M to 928.2M in just 10 years!

Permit me to suggest that if you care about St Paul, you need to consider this budget from a larger perspective: how much more spending can St. Paul actually sustain? The answer isn’t to find more resources to tax. That just keeps people from moving here, and drives out the ones with some mobility. We need to cut spending, and we need to do it now. Please do not limit your field of view to the financial data presented by the Mayor’s team. Please work with your colleagues in rolling back the proposed levy to 2% or even 5%, and earn the trust and respect that your constituents have placed in you.

Tomorrow is the American holiday dedicated to gratitude. Let’s be thankful in our city for what we have, and let’s invest maintenance first, second, and last.

Thank you.
 Sonja Mason
 Ward 2



Is that just inflation? Using this [calculator](#), it's not just inflation:

572.2 2014 dollars = 763.5 2024 dollars
 575.4 2015 dollars = 766.3 2024 dollars
 614.4 2016 dollars = 808.1 2024 dollars
 691.1 2017 dollars = 889.9 2024 dollars
 701.4 2018 dollars = 881.7 2024 dollars
 750.7 2019 dollars = 926.9 2024 dollars
 714.6 2020 dollars = 871.6 2024 dollars
 710.3 2021 dollars = 827.5 2024 dollars
 811.2 2022 dollars = 875.0 2024 dollars
 881.5 2023 dollars = 913.2 2024 dollars
 928.2 2024 dollars = 928.2 2024 dollars

Highlights from the [PiPress article](#)

“If we don’t have enough money to maintain our parks facilities, why are we putting in the budget more money to build new facilities?” said Gregory Blee, who served as a city budget director in the 1980s under then-Mayor George Latimer and later as a city council financial analyst. “That’s a major frustration with our whole committee.”

St. Paul’s effective property tax rate for median-value homes — 1.39% of estimated market value — is already the highest of all of Minnesota’s 20 regions, and the sales tax rate, 9.875%, is the highest in the state.

During 2020 to 2023, St. Paul was the only one of Minnesota’s five largest cities to lose population. At least two major private employers located downtown announced this year they would leave the city

[...]

Recommendations

Among some of the report’s recommendations:

- Establish a committee to advocate for more voluntary payments in lieu of property taxes from tax-exempt entities.
- Don’t approve Parks and Recreation design or construction funding this year or next for any facilities or park that doesn’t currently exist, including the East Side Community Center, Mississippi River Balcony, River Learning Center at Crosby Park, a multi-purpose regional athletic complex and new or enhanced water features citywide.
- Don’t approve sales tax bond issues until the city’s Office of Financial Services prepares a comprehensive bonding and debt service report.

- Don't use long-term bonds to pay for police and fire public safety vehicles that have a short shelf life and will not survive the life of the bond issue.