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## Hard times force hard looks at how we spend

Basic services aren't hard to understand. They're things like fixing streets and hauling trash. Making sure people are safe and keeping neighborhood standards high. Running libraries and maintaining parks.

People in government sometimes forget that providing basic services is a city's main job. Hard times help us remember.

The mayor tells us there's a \$100 million shortfall in the General Fund and proposes closing that gap with \$52 million in efficiencies and savings. That means giving city workers unpaid furlough days, looking to tweak hours at libraries and rec centers, consolidating jobs, and scrapping raises for cabinet members in support of Council's scraping its own. In addition, he plans to save \$39 million with "revenue enhancements," which means raising traffic fines and ending the price break for early payments. It also includes a one-time use of excess fire pension mill levy funds totaling almost \$18 million. Lastly, the mayor plans to take \$9 million from reserves.

When all the jiggering is finished, we'll end up with a General Fund of \$896 million. That's a lot of money, which doesn't even include social service funding that comes from a dedicated mill levy plus state and federal aid. I say we look at ways to streamline spending the General Fund. We need to challenge ourselves to find better ways to deliver services by asking structural questions. Do we need 11 city council districts when fewer might do? Or two at-large council members when one might be fine? Must we have a Manager of Safety in addition to fire, police and sheriff's departments? Do we spend too much time "planning" and too little implementing?

The list is long, but important. We ought to be refocusing on efficiency, basic services and living within our means, not seeking creative ways to raise taxes so things stay as they are. Having \$896 million to spend ought to be plenty.

**City News**  
**From Councilwoman Jeanne Faatz**