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We need to all pull together in this fiscal storm

When you climb into a lifeboat in a storm, two things need to be perfectly clear. First, that everybody rows in the same direction, and second that resources are divvied up fair and square.

The city climbed into a fiscal lifeboat recently with the mayor's announcement of budget cuts to deal with a \$120 million General Fund revenue hole caused by the recession. Important services were scaled back, promised raises disappeared, 170 people lost their jobs, and many employees face five more furlough days plus increased pension deductions that add up to a 4 percent cut in take-home pay.

The mayor asked that we keep faith, row in the same direction and spread the pain fairly. He didn't mention that two projects the administration favors will siphon money from the General Fund while everyone else has to make do with less.

One of these pets is a business incentive program that will suck up \$1.7 intended for city services. This is in addition to \$1 million worth of subsidies already encumbered.

Another drain is \$1.5 million for homeless services that comes on top of Human Services and federal stimulus dollars, plus \$800,000 annually for 20 years to build apartments. If you don't recall being asked whether you want the city in the apartments-for-the-chronically-homeless business, don't feel bad. You weren't.

My 2009 citizen survey showed clearly that in tough times you favor cutting both these areas. But you'll have to give up services to pay for these expenditures if I can't get council and the mayor to return the resources in the final budget. Whichever way it turns out, an important lesson remains. The General Fund is the city's principal source for basic services. In a fiscal storm, the way to keep the city shipshape is to hold this important fund on a tight course.

City News
From Councilwoman Jeanne Faatz