

Mistretta, Susan

From: Heidi Henninger <heidi.henninger@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 9, 2020 9:49 AM
To: City Council - All
Cc: Dover School Board; Harbron, William
Subject: Budget process comments

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Dear City Councilors,

I'm writing to provide comments toward the FY2021 budget approval process. I appreciate that this year's budget process provides unique challenges as Dover contends with the socio-economic impacts of covid-19, balances spending with lost sources of revenue, and initiates efforts to assist the community by delaying fees and bills. I encourage you all to engage in thoughtful collaborative dialog that trims budgets where necessary without resorting to punitive cuts that ultimately do more harm than good. Additionally, I support efforts to lobby and apply for municipal financial relief as part of federal stimulus packages. Sources of income to address gaps on the revenue side are of urgent need, accordingly I applaud the efforts of the School Board on this front.

I believe that the success of the budget process should never be judged by the rather arbitrary line drawn in the sand by the tax cap. As I've stated in prior comments, the tax cap passed in 2007, by a margin of 405 votes, with only 6,045 ballots cast. In 2020, we are a city of 22,000 registered voters. Given how much Dover has changed in the last 13 years, even during this crisis it is misguided, non-productive, and inappropriate to reduce the budget process to a binary pass or fail. Rather, I encourage all Councilors to approve well thought out department budgets which response to our community's needs.

As it relates to the education portion of the budget, now is the time to lean into the work done to strengthened relationships between the Council and Board. I am encouraged to hear that creative solutions have been found to reduce the education proposal without affecting staffing levels, salary agreements, or the district's regulatory compliance. However, I worry about the implications of extreme cuts on much need technology and facility improvements, additional student services, and progress toward the strategic plan. Therefore, I encourage you to consider a school budget proposal that is in the best interest of our students, even if it remains over the tap cap.

As you well know, education in particularly, but other departments as well, operate under tight, and in many cases unrealistic, budgets because of constrictions at the state and federal level, down-sourcing of costs to municipalities, and rising health insurance and pension program costs. These are issues we need to address as vocal citizens and voters in state and federal elections. Even in these times of economic hardship, we should strive to avoid putting the burden of taxation and funding decisions made at higher levels of government on the shoulders of our residents.

I don't envy the hard decisions that Dover's public servants will need to make this year to maintain necessary services and some semblance of the initiatives that make our community thrive, while addressing the devastating impacts of the covid-19 response, but I hopeful that this crisis will bring with it a renewed sense of community and solidarity. Thank you for your service in these most challenging times.

Sincerely,

Heidi Henninger
23 Nelson Street

