

Alderman Backes Update

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October and November are budget season for the City of South Milwaukee, and recently we as the city council passed the next year's budget, which is now [available for your review](#) online.

There is a rather extensive process that goes into making the city budget, and frankly, as a council we probably have the smallest role in it. A ton of work goes in by the city staff to creating the annual operating budget. With money always getting tighter, levy increases low and little in the way of assistance coming from the state, cities like ours have to get increasingly creative with how they put their budgets together. It is a building crisis that is going to reach a head sooner than later.

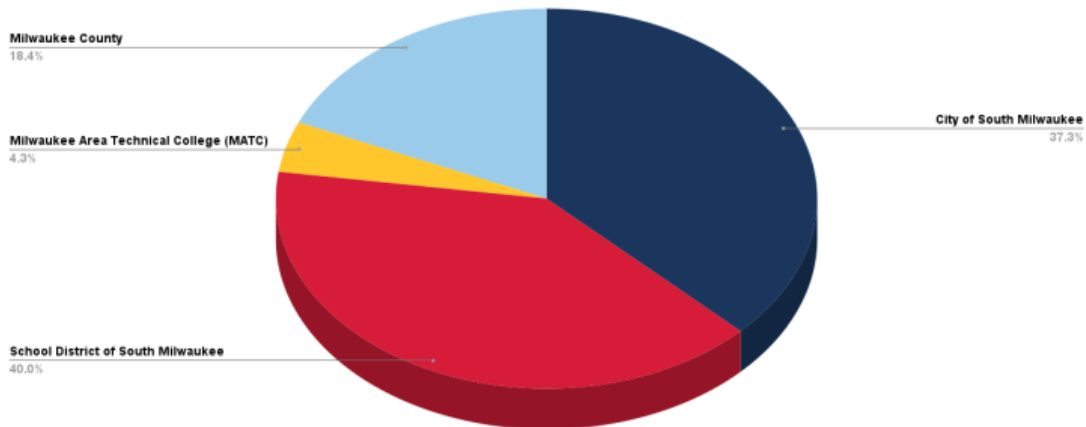
I thought it would be a good idea in this update to briefly touch on some of the higher points of the budget. As a reminder, this information is *always* available on the city's website.

(I should also give the disclaimer that I am not, by any means, an expert in these matters, though I have learned a lot in my first couple years on the council.)

I'll start by giving you a series of images you may well be familiar with. When I was elected and had my first meeting with city administrator Tami Mayzik and assistant city administrator Patrick Brever, this was the first stuff they showed me with regard to city finance.

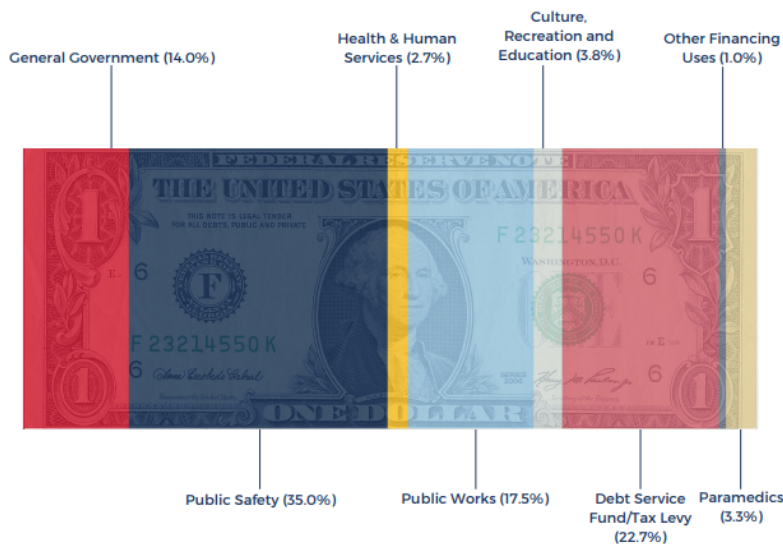


WHERE DO YOUR TAX DOLLARS GO?



So to start with, here's a quick look at where your taxes go. There's a fairly even split between the city and the school district. More of your property taxes go to the school district than the city. A smaller chunk goes to the county, and a little slice goes to MATC.

For our purposes, we're interested in the city's portion.



Under the 2023 Annual Budget, this is the allocation for city spending. The largest category is public safety (police and fire, inspections, etc.) at 35 percent, followed by debt service and tax levy at 22.7 percent, public works (think street department and public projects) at 17.5 percent, general government (mostly salaries but also elections, administration, assessment, common council, mayor, etc.) at 14 percent, culture/rec/education at 3.8 percent (remember, “education” here doesn’t mean the school district), paramedics at 3.3 percent, health and human services at 2.7 percent, and “other” for the final percent.

Now, I’m not going to take you through all 42 pages of the budget; if you’re interested in a more detailed, line-by-line look at everything going on there, I’d encourage you to click through at the link above.

	ACTUAL 2021	6 MONTH ACTUAL 2022	ESTIMATED 2022	BUDGET 2021	BUDGET 2022	BUDGET 2023	
GENERAL GOVERNMENT	3,085,881	1,578,968	3,082,533	2,883,522	3,167,641	3,234,081	2.10%
PUBLIC SAFETY	7,298,189	3,494,987	7,150,301	7,721,503	7,731,248	8,058,652	4.23%
HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES	599,634	292,059	570,084	588,721	603,294	628,489	4.18%
PUBLIC WORKS	3,820,203	1,942,857	3,814,032	3,865,053	3,774,053	4,031,142	6.81%
CULTURE, RECREATION & EDUCATION	878,027	778,547	857,352	912,978	880,890	874,238	-0.76%
CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT	41,662	75,683	100,163	29,821	185,272	192,190	3.73%
DEBT SERVICE FUND/TAX LEVY	4,049,048	2,281,319	5,342,691	4,049,048	4,676,007	5,232,116	11.89%
OTHER FINANCING USES	0	0	1,300	1,300	1,300	1,300	0.00%
CONTINGENCY ACCOUNT	15,218	6,637	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	0.00%
PARAMEDICS	901,893	773,623	894,654	901,893	894,654	760,503	-14.99%
EXPENDITURE TOTALS	20,689,755	11,224,681	21,853,111	20,993,838	21,954,357	23,052,711	5.00%
REVENUE TOTALS	9,312,559	1,851,057	9,974,305	9,556,800	9,864,046	10,380,655	5.24%
TAX LEVY - CITY PURPOSES	11,377,196	9,373,624	11,878,806	11,437,038	12,090,311	12,672,056	4.81%

General Fund Balance	
Beginning of year	6,366,813
General Fund Balance (deficit)	6,244,237
end of year	

This is one of the other more high-level components of the budget document that will be of interest to people. Here you see a comparison over a couple years of these major categories of spending within the city. Essentially you’re seeing a general breakdown of how the money gets allocated year over year, and where there have been cuts or additions.

For example, you can see that there has been a very small cut in the budget for 2023 in the category of Culture, Recreation & Education, and an

even larger cut for paramedics, while there was an increase for debt service fund/tax levy and other notable increases for public works, health and human services, and public safety.

If you want to see where and why these costs rise or fall, you would go later into the document. Let's take a look at public works as an example, where you can see there was a 6.81 percent increase in the budget.

PUBLIC WORKS								
54110	STREET MACHINERY <small>SEE PAGE 10</small>	619,742	365,025	583,119	588,353	569,581	662,099	16.24%
54120	GARAGES & SHEDS <small>SEE PAGE 10</small>	82,194	88,106	175,153	150,588	157,749	163,912	3.91%
54190	SAFETY <small>SEE PAGE 11</small>	2,200	2,200	2,924	2,428	2,924	4,705	60.91%
54210	ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT <small>SEE PAGE 11</small>	286,937	128,869	254,456	296,038	295,237	309,092	4.69%
54215	STORM WATER UTILITY <small>SEE PAGE 11</small>	14,918	15,661	17,938	17,084	17,938	18,835	5.00%
54220	STREET SUPERINTENDENT <small>SEE PAGE 11</small>	269,585	127,317	254,402	270,340	263,018	277,295	5.43%
54310	STREET MAINTENANCE <small>SEE PAGE 11</small>	335,782	144,477	322,063	448,875	451,465	468,033	3.67%
54350	SNOW & ICE REMOVAL <small>SEE PAGE 12</small>	370,893	214,145	354,583	307,545	310,232	320,907	3.44%
54410	TRAFFIC CONTROL <small>SEE PAGE 12</small>	194,304	78,122	155,983	193,181	195,548	212,305	8.57%
54420	STREET LIGHTING <small>SEE PAGE 12</small>	296,132	128,398	300,000	330,000	300,000	300,000	0.00%
54430	TREE & BRUSH CONTROL <small>SEE PAGE 12</small>	142,901	108,494	214,442	175,717	180,905	213,950	18.27%
54710	GARBAGE & TRASH COLLECTION <small>SEE PAGE 12</small>	1,002,173	453,572	978,011	824,967	790,013	827,588	4.76%
54720	SELF DEPOSIT STATION <small>SEE PAGE 12</small>	124,968	63,830	151,393	172,520	149,308	159,766	7.00%
56130	WEED CONTROL <small>SEE PAGE 12</small>	77,476	24,641	49,565	87,417	90,135	92,655	2.80%
TOTALS - PUBLIC WORKS		3,820,203	1,942,857	3,814,032	3,865,053	3,774,053	4,031,142	6.81%

These costs are broken down in even greater detail later in the document, but this gives you a quick look at general categories in which costs rose for the street department in next year's budget. The city is spending more in just about every area, in large part due to rising costs of materials and labor. This is essentially what has led to the 6.81 percent budgeted increase in this area.

Having been sitting in on public works meetings all year, I can tell you how difficult of a time it is for local public works departments like ours. South Milwaukee specifically is quite understaffed at the moment in the public works department. Our city is tasked with the difficult prospect of attempting to maintain the same level of service and repair or enhance infrastructure while facing inflation and staffing difficulties. It's a problem plaguing many small towns at the moment and it's not going away any time soon.

I would encourage you to go through the budget yourself for more information. The very broad images I showed at the top only tell you so

much. You can get very specific breakdowns, including individual items the city spends money on in these departments, if you go through the full report. Want to know how much the city spent on electricity for street lighting, for example? You can find it there!

If you'd like to meet with me to discuss the budget in greater depth, I'd be happy to get together over a cup of coffee (well, not coffee for me, I find it disgusting, but I do love tea!) sometime. I'd also encourage you to reach out to city staff.

Speaking of staff, they did a tremendous job in putting all of this together. It's getting harder and harder every year to have a functioning city government in an area where costs are rising significantly faster than income and where higher levels of government seem to have no interest in lending any aid. Our city staff always manages to do their best with what they're given. You can't really understate how important (and challenging) that is.

Next time: an update after our December 20th council meeting. Thanks for reading!