

News

Aldermen examine state of their wards, future plans

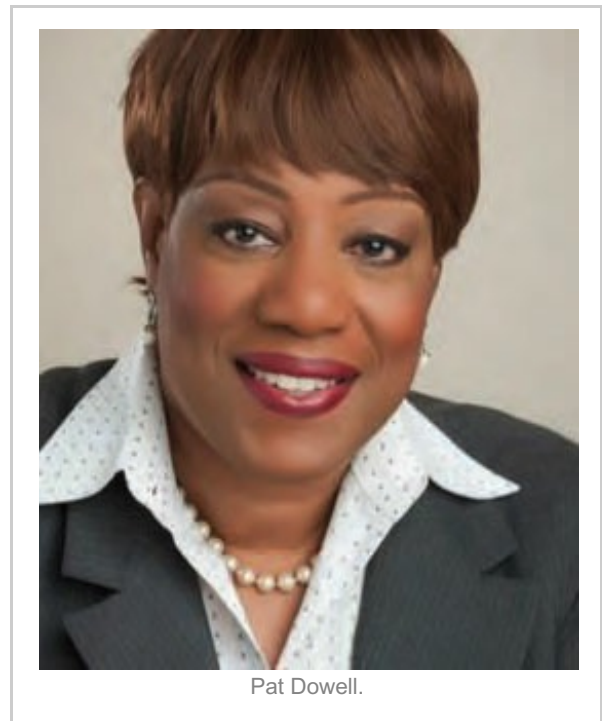
May 4, 2018

Editor's note: Gazette Chicago reporters spoke to Aldermen Pat Dowell, Sophia King, Patrick D. Thompson, George Cardenas, Danny Solis, Walter Burnett, Jason Ervin, and Brendan Reilly about the state of their wards and their plans for the community for the rest of this year and leading into 2019.

By Peter Winslow

Third Ward Alderman **Pat Dowell** said she has backed and fostered myriad positive City initiatives since her election in 2007. Previous to her service as Alderman, she was a Chicago city planner and deputy commissioner for neighborhood planning, and she also directed several non-profits.

“Throughout my career, going back to when I worked in the Department of Planning and Development, I have strived to provide ample housing and impactful resources to all residents,” said Dowell. “That means adding affordable housing and market rate housing where necessary so that everyone can live in and enjoy our community.”



Pat Dowell.

Dowell is currently leading the redevelopment plan for the Rosenwald Courts Apartments located in Bronzeville. This restoration of the apartments will make more than 230 new and affordable rental units available for 3rd Ward residents and other interested Chicagoans.

Since 2016, Dowell, along with the Department of Planning and Development, worked to manifest the Parade of Homes initiative, which “has brought much needed market-rate single-family housing to Bronzeville,” she said.

In addition to working to strengthen the residential housing market and demand, Dowell champions plans to promote commercial development, high quality educational opportunities, and jobs for her constituents.

“I have long been an advocate for Minority Business Enterprises and Disadvantaged Business Enterprises and local hiring on construction projects in my ward, including major projects like the Rosenwald redevelopment, Wintrust Arena, the Marriott Marquis Hotel, Williams Park Fieldhouse expansion, and more,” she said.

There has also been tangible impact on several 3rd Ward amenities such as renovations to the historic Garfield Green Line Station, the McCormick Place/Chinatown Green Line Station, the resurfacing of arterial streets including 47th and 51st Street, and numerous other improvements.

Redevelopment and infrastructure projects are not the only issues on Dowell’s mind, however. She said she strives to enhance area schools and give 3rd Ward students the opportunities they deserve.

Bronzeville is slated for a new classical school, “adding yet another high-quality educational option to the area,” said Dowell. “In addition, I am proud to be bringing a new high school to the South Loop... the improvements we have made to the existing neighborhood schools, which are performing better than ever, in part thanks to my decision to use surplus millions of dollars in TIF funds to help drive educational achievements in my schools.”

A question that comes up frequently in the City of Chicago is the concern with public safety. Dowell has long advocated for additional police officers in the districts in the 3rd Ward while also pushing to obtain ShotSpotter, a real-time gunshot detection and alert service system.

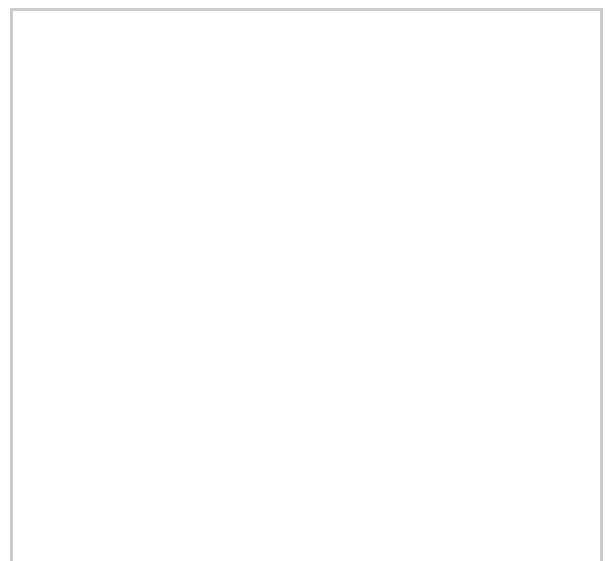
“But we can’t just police ourselves out of this problem,” said Dowell. “I have cosponsored ordinances to implement badly needed police reforms to improve police-community relations.” She and Ald. Sophia King each year sponsor the Safe Summer initiative to provide jobs to area youth while they are on summer break.

“It’s going to take all of us working together to solve the public safety issues facing our city,” said Ald. Dowell. “But I truly believe the 3rd Ward is on the right track.”

By Peter Winslow

Fourth Ward Alderman **Sophia King** said she plans “to strengthen infrastructure development” in the community, “keeping constituents in mind” when making decisions that affect 4th Ward residents.

For students, King noted she has worked to establish the Chicago Builds initiative for local teens and the Co-Curricular Program for area elementary students. To form Chicago Builds, King partnered with Dunbar Vocational High



School and numerous general contractors to “work towards creating a direct pipeline from high school to apprenticeship programs,” she said. The initiative strives for future generations of Dunbar and other City of Chicago students to have the opportunity for gainful employment after graduation.

King established the Co-Curricular Program for local first through fourth grade students. The ten-week after-school program includes multiple sports, chess, and other tasks that promote critical thinking skills. King wants to ensure students have access to “wrap around” services meant to keep children off the street.

Now in its second year, Building Community Block by Block, an initiative that focuses on expanding youth programs, entrepreneurship education, and summer jobs to create a safe environment for the community, is an extension of CPS’s Safe Passage program, providing activities well into the summer months.

As part of her commitment to infrastructure improvement, King has formed a Dog Park Committee tasked with supervising future creation of a pet-friendly park. In addition, King continues to use the City’s Menu Program to prioritize the ward’s infrastructure improvements. She regularly meets with various stakeholders in the communities to “establish an equitable and transparent distribution of funds,” she said.

Some of the Menu funding supports constructing and maintaining 4th Ward amenities. At the lakefront, bridge construction on 41st Street will conclude this year, while workers will finish a bridge on 43rd Street in 2019. “These bridges are part of a commitment to increase access to the lakefront for residents of the South Side who have been devoid of such access for years,” said King.

“Accessible transportation is vital to the 4th Ward,” King said, noting she continues to fight for weekend scheduling for the 39th Street Pershing Chicago Transit Authority bus that travels east to 40th and Lake Park St. and west to 38th and St. Louis Ave. “The bus is used heavily by seniors to access various amenities such as Mariano’s, Jewel-Osco, and the Red, Orange, and Green CTA ‘L’ lines,” she said.

King aims to foster business development, saying “I want to ensure that we provide amenities to the local community that residents in other parts of the City often take for granted.”

With gentrification a hot topic across the city, King advocates for equity and inclusion in all its forms. She believes it is important “to make sure legacy members of the community enjoy current prosperity,” wanting longtime residents to benefit from economic improvements in the



Sophia King.

ward, and she affirmed that they will have their voices represented in any discussion involving ongoing development in the 4th Ward.

By Madeline Makoul

Planning another year of improvements ahead, Alderman **Patrick D. Thompson** is dedicated to strengthening the 11th Ward through safety measures, infrastructure improvements, and business development.

Thompson, who has served as the Alderman in the 11th Ward since 2015, said that public safety “is my number one priority,” Thompson said. “If people don’t feel safe in a community, they are going to leave.”

To ensure public safety, Thompson communicates daily with police, focusing on the specific crime issues in his ward – specifically burglaries – and actively works to decrease them. With warmer weather approaching, Thomson said he is increasingly conscious of crime, which typically spikes as the temperatures rise.

To combat crime in the 11th Ward, Thompson promotes initiatives such as an increase of officers on bicycles who can ride down streets and alleys, exposing people to police presence in the area. Furthermore, since becoming alderman, Thompson has purchased 19 “pod cameras” for the police, selecting locations for the cameras to go – a solution that Thompson says has helped solve crimes as well as serving as a deterrent. The cameras, which Thompson said range in cost from \$25,000 to \$35,000 each, are funded through his aldermanic menu, a City Capital Improvement Program allocation of funds to each ward.

Funds from the aldermanic menu are also used for infrastructure issues and improvements. These, Thompson said, can range from increasing LED lighting around train viaducts, to funding new murals and mosaics in the area, to improving deteriorating alleys, Thompson said.

“Concrete alleys overburden the sewer system, and that leads to potential flooding,” Thompson explained. “Now we are doing more permeable alleys, whether it be permeable brick, or concrete where the center is permeable.”

Another priority of Thompson’s is improving transportation. Thompson and 11th District Cook County Commissioner John Daley worked to reinstate the 31st Street Chicago Transit Authority bus in a pilot program three years ago, but he said this is only the beginning. Thompson hopes to expand not only the route of the bus to continue to the lakefront and



Patrick D. Thompson.

around the museum campus, but also the hours of operation beyond that of 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. To increase ridership, Thompson worked with local businesses to create incentives for people to ride the bus.

Working with and supporting the businesses in his ward is something Thompson said he does on a daily basis. Though Thompson recognizes that companies like Amazon are taking the business of the typical brick and mortar store, he is looking at new ways to attract business. One approach Thompson and Daley had was through a grant from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), which will help to promote economic development in the area.

With a focus on retail and business development, Thompson said that before doing any zoning approvals, he holds a community meeting. This level of transparency is important to Thompson as he continues to engage the community and let them know what he is doing to improve it.

When asked about possible revitalization of the Halsted Street business strip, Thompson noted that Lakeside Bank will be “breaking ground in the coming months” at Halsted and Pershing Road. “

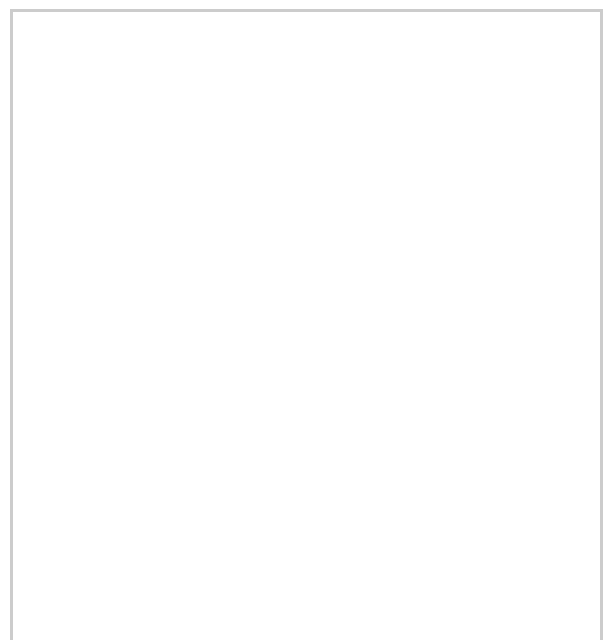
“As far as small businesses in the retail corridor, especially on Halsted and Archer,” Thompson said he and Daley will discuss how to use the CMAP grant “promote and attract new commercial and retail businesses to those corridors. As I’m sure you’re aware, the whole retail industry is evolving, with Amazon and online shopping gobbling up” much of what used to be sold in stores. “It makes it more difficult and challenging, so we are trying to address that,” Thompson said.

“We represent the community and encourage participation, so we had 30 community meetings in 2017 alone,” Thompson said. “I want to make sure that the places that should be safe are safe, reinvesting our tax dollars into programs and places that will benefit all of our neighbors and residents.”

By Madeline Makoul

George Cardenas, who has served as the alderman in the 12th Ward since May 2003, plans to continue his efforts to strengthen the area while adapting to the environment and needs of the community.

Cardenas said one focus of his is improving infrastructure in the 12th Ward, which includes McKinley Park, Brighton Park, and Little Village. These improvements have included restoring lighting – which can help decrease crime – and redoing sidewalks. However, Cardenas hopes to continue to expand these updates to the



alleys – which, he says, are causing a lot of problems due to their deterioration. With alleys' asphalt breaking down, creating potholes and other issues, Cardenas is looking for new ways to improve them.

“The alleys are old, the sewers are caved in sometimes, and asphalt needs to be redone,” he said. “In some cases, asphalt isn't going to do the job so you have to redo the alley which takes a lot of money. It's very expensive to do alleys that are more environmentally friendly, but we keep stretching the dollars as much as possible.”

In terms of education, Cardenas recognizes that there have been “good years and bad years” for Chicago Public Schools, and right now the schools suffer from a lack of funding. Cardenas wants to see funding for particular programs that have been cut to be restored in all the schools. Cardenas would like to see restoration of funds for Special Education, as well for as furthering programs for mental health initiatives and other programs that reflect the needs of the children in the area.

While Cardenas plans to further address funding for programs within the walls of the schools, he also plans to ensure that students have playing areas outside so they can be active and “can fully develop as they should,” Cardenas said. To identify these gaps in funding, Cardenas said he meets with principals to discuss what is needed in their schools.

“I want to make sure there is parity and there's no gap in funding in the programs, and I want to make sure teachers aren't being cut,” Cardenas said. “I meet on a regular basis with principals to understand what's going on. They have the support on my end to call on CPS to make sure the funding is there.”

While Cardenas will continue to focus on other initiatives such as business development, crime and transportation, he is putting a special focus on job training. Cardenas wants to connect people with jobs that require a bit of training. Cardenas is still exploring ways to address this, and presented the idea of teaming up with tech companies to “create apps that help connect those low skill jobs that are sometimes hard for people to get or find.”

Retraining job seekers to fit the jobs available in the area helps to keep community members from migrating out, opening up opportunities in their own backyards.

“It's a big interest to me that people stay in the city so that we can make it an affordable, fun, and safe place to live,” Cardenas said. “Part of it is attacking problems and renewing efforts, making the whole area strong. From an education standpoint, from an infrastructure



standpoint, quality of life, opportunities for jobs and transportation, job programs in the summer for kids – all of this creates a connection to the community, the ward, and beyond.”

By Rick Romano

When it comes to business development, 25th Ward Alderman **Danny Solis** said he favors balance.

“I will work with residents, community organizations, and businesses to strike a healthy balance of economic development while also respecting the voices of constituents,” Solis said. “The overall goal is to push for balanced development and encourage an environment that will allow new and old businesses to thrive.”

Solis noted fighting crime will take a multi-faceted approach.

“Addressing gun and gang violence are my top priorities,” he said. “I’ll work with State and Federal authorities to acquire resources to develop and implement crime fighting strategies. More resources and tools are needed in the fight, and I’ll push my friends and colleagues to fight for gun control measures at the State and local level.”

The alderman is concerned about education, and he said the “Illinois education budget has been decimated by the governor’s agenda. I will continue to speak out against the lack of funding that Chicago Public Schools face every day.”

Solis said he would work with constituents to reduce the effect of gentrification on longtime residents and businesses. “I will continue to use input provided by community organizations such as the Pilsen Land Use Committee to ensure businesses are on board with keeping prices affordable,” he said.

Solis called the City’s infrastructure improvement an ongoing effort that points out opportunities to address outdated systems. “As projects move forward, I hope to secure funding for lighting and electric grid modernization and push for more efficient street resurfacing efforts,” he said.

Turning to transportation, Solis said, “Chicago and I are consistently working to improve and update the Chicago Transit Authority and Metra. The new O’Hare transportation infrastructure expansion project will be an exciting project that will bring hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs to the city.”



By Eva Hofmann



Under Alderman **Walter Burnett's** watch, the 27th Ward is seeing growth in, among other things, housing, green space, and education.

For example, STEM (a science, technology, education and math concentration) recently has come to Brown School at Hermitage Avenue and Washington Boulevard. A \$4 million investment of public funds has gone into state-of-the-science technology and teacher training.

"We're also getting a STEM program for Crane High School," said Burnett. Located at 2245 W. Jackson Blvd., Crane will transform into an Early College STEM School beginning in the fall.



Walter Burnett.

Skinner School, 1260 W. Adams, will have a new addition to accommodate the growing student population as more people move into the community.

The ward is seeing expansion in both market-rate and low-income residences. In terms of publicly funded developments, a mixed-use development at Clybourn Avenue and Larrabee Street will include Chicago Housing Authority, affordable-housing, and market-rate units. Additional mixed-income housing is going up at Oak Street and Larrabee and Blackhawk Street and Larrabee. "We should also be finishing up the rehab of the Henry Horner Annex on Monroe and Adams," said Burnett.

The alderman was chief sponsor of the recently approved affordable-housing ordinance, which got rid of the loopholes that enabled developers to avoid affordable housing mandates. "We took off the two-mile limit," he said. "We want to encourage development in the west side of our ward, starting this year and next year."

A new transitional home for homeless people is open at 1521 N. Sedgwick St. by Lincoln Park Community Services. "It's a well-run shelter and residents do clean-up in the community," said Burnett.

The old Calhoun School will be rehabbed to provide housing for women and children. This is being done in coordination with Marillac House, Debra's Place, and Heartland Alliance.

"We just dedicated transitional housing with the Salvation Army on the 800 block of Christiana, which will give folks who lose their homes because of fire or other things a place to stay," said Burnett.

According to Burnett, construction will begin soon to rehab the old Cook County Hospital. The complex will include residential mixed-income housing, as well as a hotel and office space. “We also will be cutting the ribbon soon at McCrory Senior Apartments,” he said, referring to a new affordable senior housing development at Washington and Paulina.

Another priority for Alderman Burnett is recreation and green space. At this writing, Alderman Burnett is preparing to vote on a \$4 million rehab on the Seward Park Fieldhouse, 375 W. Elm St.

In other news, a fire station on the 700 block of Kedzie will be transformed into a community center, which will be connected to Kells Park. Skinner Park, 1331 W. Adams St., and Touhy-Herbert Park, 2106 W. Adams St., will be getting a new fieldhouse.

A new West Loop branch of the Chicago Public Library is projected to open at 118 N. Aberdeen St. in late 2018. This would be the only public library in the neighborhood and, according to Burnett, will be “a bright spot for families. It will mean the young people have somewhere to go,” he said.

Another bright spot consists of upcoming job and training opportunities. “Hopefully before the year is out we’ll be cutting the ribbon for the Hatchery,” said Burnett. The Hatchery is a nonprofit food-business incubator for food-and-beverage entrepreneurs.

By Rick Romano

Addressing business development, 28th Ward Alderman **Jason Ervin** said he favors simplifying codes and cutting red tape.

“By changing regulatory practices in Chicago, we hope to foster an environment that will allow business to become efficient and ultimately reach their maximum potential,” he said. “We will also look for ways to expand foot traffic along West Taylor Street so retail businesses can thrive.”

Ervin said tackling “gun violence” and the “opioid epidemic” are the keys to taking on crime.

“I’ll continue to push for Federal and State resources and advocate for reforms like the gun dealer licensing act,” Ervin explained. “Governor Bruce Rauner, however, vetoed the bill and has once again let down the citizens of Illinois. I will also continue the fight against petty crime and crack down on loitering, theft, and property crime. I invited our 12th District Chicago Police Commander Stephen Chung to speak at Pompei Restaurant on April 4.”



Jason Ervin.

Regarding education, Ervin said, “The West Side of Chicago is in need of a new neighborhood high school and elementary school, but the governor has made his message clear. He doesn’t believe in affordable education for Illinois. I will continue to fight his regressive policies that refuse to acknowledge the lack of funding for Chicago Public Schools. While the governor holds CPS hostage, I’ll continue to advocate for Chicago students.”

To combat gentrification that threatens longtime residents and businesses, Ervin said, “We have to keep neighborhoods affordable by making sure businesses and large developers don’t overrun areas that residents have called home for decades. Working together with the community and businesses will allow for greater development, all while spreading out the tax burden.”

He noted Chicago is constantly upgrading its infrastructure. “In the past three years, \$1 million has been invested in street and curb resurfacing for the Little Italy, Tri-Taylor, and West Loop communities of the 28th Ward,” he said.

In terms of specific 2018 projects, Ervin still is waiting for estimates from the Chicago Department of Transportation. However, \$1.3 million already has been allocated to fix and upgrade residential projects such as sidewalks and lighting infrastructure.

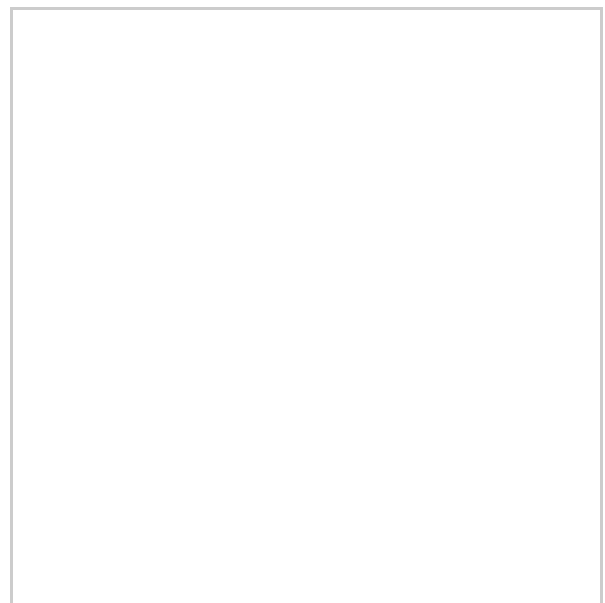
“We’ll also continue to rebuild and upgrade our water infrastructure and push for lead removal and mitigation,” Ervin said. “Chicago’s maintenance crews are working hard to ensure these projects are completed in a timely manner.”

Ervin pointed to airport and public rail improvements that enhance transportation.

“I’m excited for the new O’Hare transportation infrastructure expansion,” he said. “It’s a large undertaking, and it will provide Chicago residents access to a world-class transportation hub. At the same time, we must ensure that job and contract opportunities are provided for minority-owned businesses and ward residents. We will continue to push for CTA and Metra infrastructure improvements and upgrades.”

By Eva Hoffmann

In late March, the Chicago City Council voted to approve 42nd Ward Alderman **Brendan Reilly’s** Condominium Owner’s Privacy Ordinance, which was co-sponsored by Aldermen Brian Hopkins (2nd Ward) and Michele Smith (43rd Ward). The ordinance invokes Chicago’s Home Rule Authority to overrule Section 19(a)(7) of the Illinois Condominium Property Act, which forces condominium associations to share personal phone numbers and email addresses of all unit owners upon written request of a unit owner.



Reilly's ordinance expressly states that no unit owner (except those serving on the condo board) shall have the right to examine or make copies of a unit owner's personal information, including names, addresses, email addresses, telephone numbers and weighted votes.

Alderman Reilly sponsored the ordinance after hearing from numerous condominium associations and hundreds of 42nd Ward constituents who expressed concerns about privacy. The alderman's ordinance prevents homeowners' associations from sharing unit owners' personal cell phone numbers and email addresses, unless a two-thirds majority of the association votes to allow for the sharing of that personal information.



Brendan Reilly.

Another ordinance, introduced by the alderman in late in 2017, would require the Council Office of Financial Analysis (COFA) to prepare a fiscal impact statement at least 72 hours before a City Council vote on any measure that would directly or indirectly affect the City's coffers.

This is a relatively new concept in Chicago. According to Reilly, however, most states and many of America's largest cities already require fiscal impact notes (or statements) to be prepared for pending legislation that could have a positive or negative impact on revenue, liabilities, or the value of City or State assets.

"The Chicago City Council was wise to create COFA a few years ago," said Reilly. To date, however, COFA has not been empowered to play a regularly active role in preparing fiscal analysis for the City Council.

Reilly's Fiscal Transparency Ordinance would ensure that COFA is regularly engaged in fiscal analysis of new policy proposals brought forth by the Office of the Mayor or members of the City Council. The ordinance would require an analyst to automatically provide guidance on fiscal legislation, and would ensure COFA is regularly engaged in fiscal analysis of new policy proposals.

This will ensure that members of the City Council have a better understanding of their financial impact on the City's budget. "Fiscal ignorance has been bliss at City Hall for far too long," said Reilly. "That's one of the reasons our city has been struggling with the aftermath of bad privatization deals; costly program expansions; aggressive issuance of long-term debt; and year-over-year structural deficits. Taxpayers and their elected representatives deserve to know how much policy changes will cost, in the short term and the long term."

