

Committee to Save Salem Thanks Supporters as Voters Recommend a Different Path

Council will turn to cuts to balance budget

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SALEM, OR, November 8, 2023 - It became clear Tuesday night that a majority of Salem voters did not support the City's 5-year process to secure a sustainable source of funding for critical services provided by the General Fund.

According to City Council President Virginia Stapleton, "*Save Salem* has been, from day one, a campaign to educate voters. Though we didn't reach as many voters as we hoped, we appreciate everyone who agreed that this was the right approach."

She continued: "The City Council now faces the daunting prospect of cutting millions in services to balance the budget while working with residents across the city to secure another revenue stream. We don't have a choice on securing new revenue. We have to get to yes on something."

In 2018, the City Council established a Sustainable Revenue Task Force to identify revenue streams that could diversify and balance the General Fund. That committee recommended the employee paid payroll tax flatly rejected by voters on Tuesday. The City Council is now considering bringing a similar committee together, but very little about the constraints on the City's ability to raise revenue has changed.

"It will be important that whoever comes to the table to craft the next approach is one hundred percent committed to raising revenue for our critical city services," said Dr. Irvin Brown, vice-Chair of the City Budget Committee. "Even the opponents of this measure agreed again and again that the issue is one of insufficient revenue for services, not wasteful government spending. Our city needs and deserves solution-oriented problem solvers at the table."

The Committee to Save Salem faced serious David-versus-Goliath odds, embracing grassroots support to educate voters of Salem to stand up to the giant-sized problem facing they city. The

opposition raised over \$200,000, funds which came largely from out-of-town donors including far-right groups such as the Koch Brothers.

Based on the last estimate provided to the City Council, the tradeoffs demanded by the budget deficit are real and daunting. Without additional revenue, Salem could face the prospect of closing either two fire stations or the entire library system.

“It would be an embarrassment of national proportion if Oregon’s Capital City chained the doors on its library – especially while the state sat on \$4 billion and sent another \$5.5 billion to voters,” said Paul Tigan, former Budget Committee Chair, referring to the State’s historic budget surplus and tax kicker. “We tried to communicate to voters just what was at stake if they voted ‘no.’ Now the question is how much damage can we avoid before another solution is found?”

Michael Slater, Planning Commissioner and *Save Salem* Treasurer, was plaintive. “I am sad for our community’s future. I hope that, as the consequences of voting ‘no’ become painfully clear, we can restart the process to make Salem a healthy, strong, and successful community for all of us.”

Dr. Irvin Brown, Vice-Chair, Citizen Budget Committee: “I spoke with educators, small business owners, faith leaders, and other community members and they all agreed: when 911 is dialed, there is an expectation for quick and timely response from all emergency services. And I heard from so many voters who firmly believe that closing our libraries is the wrong decision, and that we need more first responders to better prepare us for the woes of tomorrow.

Despite this loss, we are in this together. Time to roll up our sleeves and get back to work.”

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The Committee to Save Salem was led by Council President Virginia Stapleton, Citizen Budget Committee Vice-Chair Dr. Irvin Brown, Planning Commissioner Michael Slater and former Citizen Budget Committee Chair Paul Tigan. The Committee worked to educate voters about the need to stabilize Salem’s general fund and ensure residents receive high quality, timely, municipal service.