

## Budget Ideas

1. I believe Central Street looks very run down and would like to see some of the streetscape recommendations from the Central Street Master plan implemented. For your convenience, those recommendations are attached.
2. My concern is regarding the Landmark Committee. While most members may be volunteers, the overseeing of landmark repairs, building permits and examination of landmark homes may be important to some but highly overblown in time and cost at this point. We are paying for the extension of meetings and hearings just for this small group that wields far too much power over homes that the owners should be able to determine the majority or the changes without fear or dread of additional costs for having contractors attend meetings, the threat of imposed fines for changes that are not in line with what the committee deems best and time lost on repairs due to the committee's schedule.
3. Is there anything that can be done about all the newspaper racks between Hartrey and Green Bay Road? There is no consistent look and many are damaged. Many are also generally empty.
4. I would like to see an extensive system of bicycle lanes throughout Evanston.
5. Need more trash and recycling receptacles in many areas especially around the downtown area.
6. Sell the 1620 Central St. building to a company that will get it BACK on the tax books!!!
7. In the presence of the high unemployment statistics across the country, is there consideration to freeze salaries for Evanston city employees? Is there any plan to consolidate departments in order to reduce the overall city payroll budget?
8. Lower the budget by 10%.
9. Niles has a bus that is free to residents - it takes them to all the shopping areas. Why Doesn't Evanston have this? I would be more than happy to shop downtown Evanston but the parking is not good there - this would promote lots of cultural events as well.
10. A residency card could be attached to the water/sewer bills that is good for a month at a time to residents who don't have any outstanding city bills due.
11. Low income and retired folk would be able to make use of the lakefront and downtown areas as well.
12. Evanston always seems to have a budget for tree removal, but no money to treat infected trees. It's possible that treatment would cost less than paying crews to destroy trees. Since 2008, I've been paying for periodic treatment of an infected ash tree at the corner of Cowper and Harrison under a program approved by the Evanston Forestry Department. The tree had been marked for demolition. But under the Evanston program, residents could pay for trunk injection of the chemical emamectin benzoate, trade named Tree-age. The city allowed me to pay for the tree's

preservation. Since its treatment, I've watched this tree thrive. This treatment was approved by the Illinois Department of Agriculture because it reportedly is 98 per cent effective. Yet the city seems to be willing to pay the high cost of tree removal, but not willing to pay to treat infected ash trees at a lower cost, even though the treatment is effective. Paying tree removal crews, along with the expense of shredding the trees and disposing of the wastes, is very expensive. That's what the city continues to do, apparently because that's what always has been done. Maybe it's time to consider less expensive alternatives, like trunk injection that is 98 per cent effective.

13. Introduce a moratorium on non-critical repaving and sidewalk repair. I have no problem with living with cracks in the sidewalk and potholes on the streets. Look at Oak street south of Dempster: it's a small cul-de-sac with maybe 20 houses on it. We put a crew out there this summer to re-do the curbs and street. I run down the street every day, and can attest that the old curbs and pavement were in perfectly acceptable condition. Why are we not limiting street resurfacing to critical stretches? We can get to the rest as the economy improves and revenue returns to city coffers.
14. Drop restrictions on access to the Doggie beach. I don't use that beach, but I see a park district staff person out there manning the gate full time. How much does that cost the city? \$10-20K? I find it hard to believe we recoup that money in fees – at \$40 a dog, that would take 500 dogs, and I've never seen more than a dozen or so in there at any one time. Stop guarding the gate and let anyone in, we'd save \$40K a year.
15. Renegotiate our contract with Groot and raise solid waste fees. In FY2012 we spent \$1.2 million to handle garbage pickup. Perhaps naively, I think the city should break even here. Renegotiate the contract with Groot. Raise yard waste collection fees. Eliminate the requirement that all multi-resident buildings use Groot.
16. Introduce higher non-resident fees for beach passes and daily access. We're the only community in the area that tends to charge out-of-towners the same as Evanston residents for the services we offer. Look at Wilmette: they charge almost double for virtually everything (Centennial pool, Gillson beach, park district programs, etc.) We ought to be doing the same.
17. Cut back city support of art shows, bike races, and other events. Yes, they're fun. And they might even bring in some additional revenue (though they may just as easily reduce it, eg by driving people away from downtown). But how much does the city spend in extra police, garbage pickup, and so on?
18. Waive building permit fees and business license fees for new businesses. If a business wishes to move to Evanston, it brings tax revenue and jobs. Why not make it more inviting, but eliminating the costs of setting up shop?
19. Bring the library back under direct city control. Acceding authority to the library board, who aren't elected, to independently tax Evanston residents is an absolute abomination (my if any

candidate for mayor promises to bring in a new library board, I'll vote for him/her). Once it's back under council control, close the branches. We had to give the library fund \$4.25 million last year out of our property taxes! Allow elected officials to make the decisions as to where to spend the money.

20. Shift city workers from pensions to retirement savings plans. I still don't understand why government hasn't done what private business did years ago, and move away from pensions toward retirement savings plans. I advocate establishing a 401K plan eligible to all new hires, and dropping their enrollment to the city's current pension system.
21. The road on Washington Street between Chicago and Ridge is in rough shape. Please consider it in the future plans for road resurfacing.
22. Revisit the marina – PLEASE! This is not the pipe dream of just a few. I would gladly pre-pay to rent a boat slip at any Evanston marina (South, Clark, wherever)... A bustling lakefront with sailors and diners would be fun and appealing beyond Evanstonians.
23. Let's think about ways we can clean up, rezone, landscape, etc. the stretch of Green Bay Road between Emerson and Noyes. I drive that stretch multiple times a day, and it's a downer...not reflective of what we want people passing through to think of Evanston. The businesses are fine, but we need to get rid of the billboards, spruce up the landscaping, jackhammer the leftover bridge supports near Foster, and encourage the businesses to improve/clean signage. It's too major of a thoroughfare to let it stay this way.
24. The playground at Central Street across from Foodstuffs has not been touched in 17 years or more. It was new and fun when my high school senior was a toddler. It was getting tired when my eighth grader played there, but now my 1st grader won't go there because it's "dirty." Please update this playground!
25. Install credit card parking spots all over town. In many cities, this is the norm, and I am sure people prepay for far more time than they need. The city could make some real money on these!
26. Sporadically assign Evanston police to enforce stop signs. Less than 25% of the cars coming south on Bennett stop at Park Place (in front of my house). Many don't even slow down! We need to be the town that enforces stop signs and enforces the hand-held phone ban while driving. I would never do either in Winnetka, because everyone knows they will ticket.
27. Please have the Maple Ave. garage close the roof to parking on the 4th of July. 2 years ago, it was closed due to construction, and it was a great family-friendly place to watch the fireworks with easy-out parking! This year, tons of people parked on the roof, and many pulled large cars right up to the railing and blasting "music" ruining the venue for everyone else. Plus, the moving cars and the small children was a recipe for disaster.... Small request, but please help fix this one....should be easy!

28. Finally, please conduct a study on how to improve the traffic flow at Green Bay/Ridge/Emerson. It's a nightmare, and everyday I see near misses as aggressive southbound drivers cut off others in the intersection. Maybe reduce to 1 lane southbound at the Mobil station????
29. Shift from a defined benefit to a defined contribution plan. What bothers me as a taxpayer and Evanston resident is the unwillingness of public entities to look around the world and consider how compensation has fundamentally changed. With a job market like today's, Evanston would have no problem finding people to serve in city government with a defined contribution plan.
30. Lower the speed limit to 25 MPH and ticket every car exceeding 35 MPH - no exceptions.
31. Tax increases of any kind are not needed again in the 2013 budget. Do not raise taxes.
32. Maybe we can raise some extra cash by having NU pay to get some of their properties off of the "Historic" registry .
33. Outsource city services such as tree service and garbage collection.
34. Property taxes are too high and too much tax is going to schools. Pensions for teachers are too generous – they should have to save for retirement like everyone else.
35. Residents, utility companies and corporate entities should be charged for removal of graffiti on their property. The City should not have to foot the bill to remove graffiti on the sides of corporate buildings or utility equipment.
36. The City should be realistic when raising fees and give thought to whether individuals can afford the increases.
37. The City should issue tickets for jaywalking. This would raise revenue and increase safety.
38. The City should enforce a time limit for property owners / businesses to replace broken windows and other damage to their property.
39. The City or State of Illinois should work to pass legislation that would require banks to provide maintenance for foreclosed properties.
40. The City should not rely so heavily on technology and should meet with residents face-to-face.
41. Kids should have free access to City beaches.
42. Wi-Fi internet should be available throughout the City.
43. The City's Police Department is doing a great job.
44. Take half of Parking Enforcement personnel and utilize them to patrol / enforce the cell phone ban while driving.
45. Please reduce our taxes (brought up several times).

46. Do recycling pickup every other week, since we have such large bins.
47. Don't close North Branch (brought up a few times).
48. Complaint on snow response for the 2011 blizzard, and no plowing of alleyways.
49. Desire for a simple Budget in brief, no more than 5 pages.
50. Economic development to help us cover our costs rather than raising taxes.
51. The City should buy lottery tickets and try to win it big.
52. Downtown Evanston is really just a suburb of Northwestern; there needs to be more of a destination there—particularly more blues clubs.
53. There should be a white paper written by the city on what the City can and cannot tax. This should be distributed so that people could see if taxes could be added to services.
54. Make information more readily available in Spanish.
55. I often see too many City workers in one place and it looks like some aren't doing anything.
56. Issue fewer traffic/parking tickets. I just got a ticket for parking 14" from the curb.
57. Close the Ecology Center. Close the Noyes Cultural Arts Center. Close the Art Center. Close the Robert Crown Center. Close the Health Department. Close the Human Relations Department and Human Services. Stop Mental Health Services. Close Chandler-Newberger Center. Fire people.
58. Maintain all Forestry Division positions.
59. Accelerate the current timeline for enlacing dead trees, and plant more trees to expand the urban forest. Budget for at least 1,000 new trees. To make funding go further, considering including trees smaller than the size usually planted by the city. These could be distributed and planted on parkways and potentially on private land in collaboration with Evanston TreeKeepers. Homeowners and business owners would be asked to sign an agreement to water and care for trees for a minimum of 3 years in exchange for having their tree replacement accelerated. TreeKeepers would inspect and advise on tree care.
60. Youth employment - Budget for youth employment program for summer 2013 forestry work, to include watering, weeding, and mulching trees on public land. In collaboration with Evanston TreeKeepers, youth would be give orientation to urban forestry and information about arborist and forester career opportunities.
61. We're happy that [Firemen's] Park is at last included in the budget for 2013. We are all proud of what we've accomplished with the help of the EFD and now it's time for the City to step up and fund the replacement of the equipment. The play equipment, which is outdated an unsafe,

needs to be replaced. A neighborhood preschool uses the park on a daily basis and families travel from all over Evanston because of the allure of the original Evanston fire truck that sits in the park.”

### **Comments received during Citizen Budget Input Session on September 19, 2012**

*(Staff responses provided during meeting are listed when applicable)*

If we have a surplus this year, will that money go into the next year?

- Yes, it can be budgeted that way.

How are the reserves?

- The City’s reserves are currently above the minimum Council stated requirement (one month); we have about two months of reserves at this point, some of which are separated into IMRF and compensated absences.

Motor Fuel Tax—to what extent does that cover the actual street maintenance in the City?

- Motor Fuel Tax provides about 30% of the cost for maintaining the streets in Evanston.

Have property values in TIF districts decreased? And how will this affect the debt repayment?

- At this point, we are not yet certain. We haven’t gotten a final assessment yet; Howard-Ridge and West Evanston will be most affected.

Are we borrowing money against the TIF?

- The City Council passed a resolution where they indicated they may borrow up to \$2M against TIFs.

Wouldn’t borrowing be problematic?

- At this point, the city has not borrowed at all. In the past 10 years, the debt issued was level. The City has not end-loaded its TIF debt

About the Capital Improvement Fund: I feel like capital has been a goal within the city. I don’t feel the city has proper control of its capital. It seems as if we are carrying too many projects over from one year to the next.

- The City Manager agrees, we have not been as diligent as we can. We have a very aggressive capital program. In 09-10 we basically stopped the capital program; we stopped and regrouped and now we’re being as aggressive as we can. This summer we’ve had Public Works staff on the street every day. We need to continue to work on it—the CIP budget for FY13 will be more realistic and “do-able”.

Can the City take advantage of low mortgage rates?

- Yes, we do refinance all of our bonds as soon as they are call-able. Then we call them back and reissue them at a lower rate. This past year, we saved 8% of the remaining interest costs on bonds. We also take advantage of it for IEPA bonds from the State. We’re up to 2 ½%. We are taking advantage particularly in the Water Fund, which really has no debt at this time. Our water fund is over \$100M system so some level of debt is prudent. We are not able to issue more debt on property tax supported side.

Is there a way to measure all of the efforts that have been put forth for Economic Development? When do you think we’ll start to see returns on our investments?

- Performance Measures—we’ve been talking to the Council to try to track the non-dollar, non-revenue statistics. We have a set of those metrics. We talked to the Council about six months ago on this topic; we are going to introduce that during the budget process.
- One indicator is that our revenues are no longer falling. The businesses that we are bringing here are bringing modest gains; we are anticipating a spike for Trader Joes. We are thinking that there will be an addition of \$200,000 from Trader Joe’s. There is the

possibility allowing Whole Foods to sell hard liquor which would make Evanston among a small number of Whole Foods across the US that sell spirits—we anticipate a bump with that. We are creating jobs, helping businesses locate here.

- The only other thing we are doing is our work with NU to increase athletic ticket sales. I'm not sure that's economic development per say. I think stabilization is the key word; right now, not everyone can say that.

Is it your opinion that it's necessary or not to raise property taxes this year?

- I hope not. We are working on finding a way not to pass along debt into property tax. For the last 3 years, the property tax increases have been for pension and capital debt coverage. We are working on the FY2013 Budget with the intent of not raising any taxes.
- We hear loud and clear that there's sensitivity to all taxes, fees, etc. There are some groups that feel like we should just increase property taxes rather than fees and fines, and some that disagree. We are still shooting to not raise taxes and fees. No one wants to lay more people off. My job is to balance everything. A month out from the budget, we're hearing not to raise taxes and not to lay anyone off, but that's a hard thing to do.

On Economic Development: we need to be tracking each project. Are we tracking these in any organized manner? We have all these funds we're taking money from and we should track them on a quarterly basis.

- So you'd like a quarterly report? That seems reasonable. We will start a quarterly report in the Economic Development newsletter.

Regarding the Water Fund operation—we have a lot of water pipes in the City. It sounds like we aren't spending enough money to fix everything underneath the streets. We're putting it off because it's underground. It seems irresponsible of the Council.

- I agree that we need to increase funding to water capital projects. How much can we do in any given year? There's a cost to preparing those projects. When there's a water main break, there's a cost at that point. Is it a better use of money to increase capital improvements instead? Yes. We need to continue to spend as much money as we can on water capital projects. We have a fixed window of time for projects.
- Water projects continue at the same level as FY12—about \$3M. There's also additional funding available for more projects through IEPA. And the Water Fund has a sufficient reserve for emergency breaks.

Can you give us a status update on selling more water to other communities?

- The Council approved MOUs for a variety of communities—Schaumburg, Elk Grove Village, Hoffman Estates, etc—far western cook county as well as the Northwest Water Commission—to do engineering on a pipeline to serve the communities we serve and may serve. That engineering work is halfway finished. The goal is to share with the communities that cost after the first of the year.

When would you expect some effect on our budget?

- Most important thing to figure out—how many communities want on? There would be several hundred-thousand to millions of dollars of revenue to the City from Lincolnwood. The rest of the communities have to look and see how much the capital piece would be. Inasmuch as a timeline goes, I think we'll see funds from Lincolnwood during 2013. The rest, we'll know by the end of 2013; but we're probably 5-6 years from seeing any water flowing. All of the communities have contracts with the City of Chicago that have varying expiration dates. We need to sort through obligations—is there any flexibility prior to those contracts ending. There's a mixed bag with that.

- We are not budgeting for any revenues from Lincolnwood right now; we are not hooked up to them right now, but it would be the easiest engineering wise to hook up with them.

Do you have to make the Water Plant bigger?

- We believe we can just change out the filtration process to allow for a great volume of work. There may be additional areas for increased storage capacity with Northwestern University over the next 5 years.

When can I see a difference in my tax bill on the Library Levy?

- We are working with the County on this because we do want the Library listed separately.

Can you comment on the progress of changing the Township?

- The voters of Evanston voted to pursue the dissolution of the Township. The next step is that that the IL state law needs to change—either just for Evanston or for the entire state. In order for the Township to be dissolved, a vote of the entire electorate needs to be taken. There was a bill to make those changes—that bill died without being assigned to committee.
- The City Council has decided not to push aggressively forward on IL with this issue. Staff has been providing additional oversight over the Township's functions. There is also an RFP out for a firm to assess the situation. That RFP is out on the streets right now, we anticipate it will be back to the Council at the beginning of December. I estimate \$30-\$100,000 responses; we're going to have to wait to see what we get. There's an interest as we are currently getting questions regarding that RFP.
- We are also working with the Township staff on technology, storage issues, etc. In fall 2013, the Township has indicated that they will be coming back to the Civic Center—but that is not official as of yet.

Can you comment on the benefit costs to employees and what that's been doing.

- We entered into a joint agreement with several other communities in Illinois to do that—so we've seen costs go down as we are now part of a consortium.
- For 2013, we are looking at an 8% PPO increase; 6% HMO increase. That's the first time above 5% in a long time. We just negotiated changes to our benefit plan to reduce that increase; fire accepted higher deductibles and co-pays. Now they are accepting a percentage of costs rather than flat fees; this way, we will all increase together.
- We went through an audit of all employees to make sure everyone on insurance was legitimately able to be included. We are able to save money through that.
- Because we are self-funded, we can track what employees are doing—98% of our PPO employees are staying within the network. We are also rolling out a wellness plan and anticipate being able to mitigate/anticipate & prevent large claims.

Is disciplinary being taken to recover money from employees abusing the healthcare?

- Yes—we are taking action.

What's the status with replacing Robert Crown?

- That will be to Council on Monday night.

Aldermen and benefits—how are those set?

- They are paid the same as exempt employees. That is a policy that we are currently working under.

Some council members are old enough for Medicare? If they are, the City shouldn't be their primary insurance.

- The rule is that once you get to Medicare age, you can apply for Medicare B and then you receive a reduced rate. For our retirees, the differential is huge—people who don't apply to Medicare B are just throwing away money. For active employees, they can remain on the City's plan OR go to Medicare, but we can't force that.

