



Miguel A. Meléndez, Jr. Council President, Councilmember At-Large

Mitch Gruber Finance Chair, Councilmember At-Large

October 3, 2023

The Honorable Malik D. Evans, Mayor
30 Church Street, Room 305A
Rochester, NY 14614

Mayor Evans:

Subsequent to our thorough review of your 2023-24 Proposed Budget for the City of Rochester, we herein present you with a summary of our review process and comments related to the 2023-24 Approved Budget.

I. General Overview

- The Approved 2023-24 Budget of \$674,686,100 represents an increase of \$30,529,050 from the Amended 2022-23 Budget.
- General Funds revenue estimates increased by 3.1%, Special Fund revenue estimates increased by 3.4%, and the Enterprise Fund revenue estimates increased by 12.1%.
- The tax rate for homestead properties increased by 4.63% and non-homestead properties decreased by (4.82%).
- For a typical house assessed at \$87,900, water charges increased by \$33.40, while refuse charges and local works charges did not change.
- Assessed value of property increased by \$38,338,146 or 0.50% for an overall value of \$7,657,992,517.
- Staffing levels for the City increased by 31 full-time positions for an overall total of 2,913.
- The City's 2023-24 payment to the New York State Retirement System is budgeted at \$48.6 million, a \$4.4 million decrease from the amount budgeted for 23-24 in the 2022-23 fiscal year. The 2024-25 payment is projected to increase to \$60.8 million and long-term projections show relatively flat or slightly increasing as the City will trend toward long-term OSC rates.

II. City Council Review Process

This year's process followed a similar schedule as the prior year, with the hearings taking place in late May, allowing for additional time between the conclusion of the hearings and the budget vote.

Prior to the budget hearings, OMB and City Council staff distributed a pre-hearing questionnaire to each department, which helped to inform the Council staff analysis. Council staff also sent a memo to the Administration in the early spring of 2023, identifying five major Council priorities: public health & safety, housing, workforce development, economic growth, and parks, recreation & open space. This year, Councilmembers also ranked the Mayor's six budget priorities as stated in the 2022-23 budget, ranking Public Safety as the most important, followed by Strengthening Neighborhoods, and Promoting Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice.

The hearings took place over the course of three days, and the conversations with yourself, our colleagues, and members of the Administration were informative and productive. We thank you and your staff for accommodating the hearing schedule and providing written answers to our questions in a timely manner.

Similar to the review of the City's proposed budget, the Council also holds a review of the RCSD budget. The City Council vote for the RCSD budget is largely symbolic, as the State mandates a fixed amount be paid to the District and the Board of Education approves the budget prior to its receipt by City Council. We plan to work with the RCSD and Administration to develop a more meaningful review process this year – one that occurs while the RCSD budget is still in draft form.

Upon the conclusion of the City department hearings and the RCSD hearing, the Council once again hosted a Joint Public Hearing with the Commissioners of the Rochester City School District's Board of Education to hear from the community about both the City of Rochester and Rochester City School District Annual Budgets.

Councilmember Lightfoot made a specific request, asking that public engagement in the Administration's budget be emphasized and expanded. Additionally, he asked that this engagement be better reflected in the budget hearings process, and we concur. We will work to incorporate a specific portion of the hearings that is dedicated to a review of such public engagement.

III. Items of Note

We are grateful for the continued investment in the Council's priorities. In particular, we are pleased to see the addition of three Code Enforcement Inspectors. We are eager to understand the benefit of having a significantly expanded Code Enforcement team, and we

request to begin receiving quarterly Code Enforcement “report cards” from the department of Neighborhood and Business Development.

We welcome your proposal for a new Director of Emergency Management and believe this will help create a more coordinated network among our Public Safety departments.

We are very pleased to see the conversion of many part-time jobs to full-time jobs across the City’s workforce, providing our employees a career path where they will earn a living wage and better benefits. We expect that these positions will be filled with candidates that represent our City’s diversity.

At the June Council meeting, the Council President introduced three resolutions of budgetary intent urging your Administration to commit underrun funds from the City Council & Clerk 2022-23 budget toward specific projects including:

- \$500,000 to conduct a public utility feasibility study initiated by the State and/or County
- \$150,000 to initiate an outside evaluation of the Neighborhood Service Centers
- \$750,000 to reduce homelessness, increase affordable housing options, and provide additional mental health resources & social-emotional wellness programs

An additional resolution of budgetary intent requested that the Rochester Police Department engage in workflow study of the department’s staffing model, specifically to address:

- How the current staffing model deploys officers
- Location and placement of section offices
- Departmental overtime, including in regard to special events
- Output of the Office of Business Intelligence and the public availability of such data
- Response times and closing of jobs against priority categories and GPS data
- A plan to work toward a crime-data driven staffing model

While we are largely in support of the 2023-24 proposed budget, these four resolutions were specifically introduced to address areas of concern among the body not met by the budget. It is our hope that the Evans Administration move swiftly on these resolutions, and partner with the City Council to utilize these underruns effectively. We look forward to receiving updates on these items before January 1, 2024.

We support your administrations use of ARPA dollars to invest in our infrastructure, buildings, and technology. Notably, there is widespread support of the ARPA investments in our water infrastructure to ensure that we support the health and wellness of our community. As the deadline for ARPA expenditures approaches, we are anxious to better understand how the Council will be kept abreast of any unspent or reallocated funds.

As City Councilmembers, it is our responsibility to scrutinize the items before us, and ultimately guide the City's investments of taxpayer dollars. We all believe in the importance of measurement – data collection, transparent reporting and detailed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are absolutely critical to this Council. It is imperative that we are able to provide our constituents with clear evidence that we are spending their tax dollars wisely. Several departments did an exemplary job providing useful KPIs and data, while other departments struggled. We will collaborate with OMB throughout the year to ensure that critical KPIs are included in next year's budget.

In last year's letter, we stressed the importance of developing a formal, robust, transparent, and public plan related to violence, with clearly identified Key Performance Indicators to drive the work in the Mayor's Office of Violence Prevention, the Rochester Police Department, the Crisis Intervention Services, etc. We appreciate the work that has been done in the last year, but we all know that violence is still a major issue in our community. We are once again asking to see a cohesive and detailed strategic plan on how this Administration is addressing these issues. A blueprint to a safer community will help Council and the constituents we serve better understand the path towards continuous improvements in public safety.

IV. Conclusion

We conclude by congratulating you and your Administration for providing a balanced budget that closes the budget gap while investing in Council's priorities. City Council will continue to work with the Administration as we navigate the rest of this fiscal year and look forward to working with you on next year's spending plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Miguel A. Meléndez, Jr." in a cursive script.

Miguel A. Meléndez, Jr.
City Council President

A handwritten signature in blue ink that appears to read "Mitch Gruber" in a cursive script.

Mitch Gruber
Finance Committee Chair