

# CITY OF LEWISTON

CITY COUNCIL

APRIL 22, 2003

## BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS AT 6:00 PM

THE HONORABLE LAURIER T. RAYMOND, JR., MAYOR, PRESIDING.

PRESENT: Councilors Philippon, Bernier, O'Brien, Jean, Mason, Paradis, Rousseau, City Administrator James Bennett, Assistant City Administrator Phil Nadeau, Finance Director Richard Metivier, Purchasing Agent Norman Beauparlant and City Clerk Kathleen Montejo.

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Moment of silence.

Mayor Raymond explained the budget public hearing process and the budget workshop process. He noted that the public will have two opportunities to comment on the budget during two public hearings. The first hearing will be tonight and the final hearing will be in mid May at the end of the budget workshops, but before the Council takes final action to adopt the budget.

### BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING

Mayor Raymond opened the public hearing. He invited audience members to address the Council on any aspect of the municipal budget that they would like to speak about. Eight members of the public addressed the Council at this time. All spoke against the proposal in the City Administrator's proposed budget to charge a collection fee for weekly trash pick up from apartments with four or more units, as well as the proposal to eliminate the spring clean-up program.

Edward Toussaint of Woodside Drive - Mr. Toussaint stated that his profession is to help residents find homes to live in, in Lewiston. He is opposed to the proposal to eliminate the spring trash clean-up from the apartment buildings and is opposed to having the apartment owners be charged for the weekly collection of the household trash. He stated he owns over 125 units in town and strives to be a responsible landlord and re-invests much of his proceeds back into the buildings to maintain the structures both inside and out. He does not feel that classifying the apartments as commercial businesses is fair to the landlords.

Frederick Goldrup of 107 Shawmut Street - Mr. Goldrup read a prepared statement which outlined the fact that he has resided in this same apartment for many years. He said that he is on a fixed income and if the City starts to charge the landlords to collect the weekly trash, then the rents would have to be increased to reflect this change and he can not afford to have an increase in his monthly rent, and he noted that many of the other tenants can not afford this either. Mr. Goldrup said that he feels this proposal is a discriminatory act by the City against renters who can not afford to own their own property.

Kevin Fletcher, Vice President of the Rental Housing Association - Mr. Fletcher addressed the Council and said that many members of the Rental Housing Association are apartment owners who own a very small number of units and they should not be viewed as commercial enterprises. Many of the members of the Association live in owner-occupied units that perhaps have two or three rental units in the same building where their own unit is located. He said that many of the owners are working hard to upgrade their buildings and for many years do not collect a profit from the rentals, yet re-invest their funds back into the building for upgrades and repairs. He spoke against the proposal to have the City collect a fee for weekly trash pick up and the elimination of the spring clean up program for apartments. Mr. Fletcher also mentioned that some apartments do not have the room to have a dumpster placed on the property for residents to use. Mr. Fletcher urged the Council to wait on making a decision on this item. He stated that, speaking personally and not representing the RHA, a decision made now, he felt, would be premature and he suggested making the changes in a few years or phasing it in over time. Mr. Fletcher said that there are about 560 members of the RHA and they just heard about this proposal on Friday when they read it in the paper. He suggested that this proposal should have been discussed first with the Association members at a meeting.

Paula Downs of 174-176 Blake Street - Ms. Downs cited the high turnover rate in tenants in the apartment building that she currently resides in, stating that about one-third to one-half of the units are currently empty. She noted that the landlords have a difficult time finding tenants to fill some apartments and with the addition of a "trash tax" added to the monthly rental amount, it will be hard for residents to find affordable housing. She noted that for many families in today's economy every dollar counts and it is hard to survive economically and this increased fee will be a hardship on the tenants.

Lee Morin of 452 Main Street - Mr. Morin addressed the Council and stated that the punch card system that is used in Portland would work well in Lewiston regarding the collection of large bulky waste items from apartments, such as old sofas, refrigerators, etc. He stated that he owns about forty apartment units in Lewiston - seven buildings that have about 5-6 units each. He is opposed to the addition of the fee for weekly trash collection and the proposed elimination of the spring clean up week. He stated that as a landlord, he regularly brings items to the landfill for his tenants, just so the items can get out of the buildings and not create a fire or code risk regarding storage of old material such as mattresses and so forth.

Mr. Bernier of 22 Wakefield Street - Mr. Bernier informed the Council that he lives and works in Lewiston and was born in the city as well. He said that he has great pride in Lewiston and in the five unit apartment building that he owns. Over the past twenty years, Mr. Bernier stated that he has invested \$113,000 back into the building - he said that he works hard to re-invest every cent that he earns from the rents back into the property to make it a nice home for his family and for his tenants' families. He stated that segregating out the apartments for this additional and separate fee is simply not fair.

Don Ariel of 50 Old Farm Road - Mr. Ariel made a brief presentation to the Council stating that he owns 84 rental units in town currently and many tenants are senior citizens on fixed incomes. Mr. Ariel said that these tenants are the ones that voted the current Council into office and noted that 72% of his renters are in subsidized housing and can not afford any

additional increases. He said that many of his properties are classified as Section 8 federal housing. He urged the City Council to not approve the proposal to eliminate spring clean up and to charge landlords for the weekly trash collection. He said that he and all landlords want the City to be clean and he is concerned that the elimination of the spring clean up program would encourage additional trash around the City year round. He feels this proposal is picking on the landlords. He is afraid that with the elimination of the spring clean-up program, there will be more building fires because more mattresses and other materials will just be left on porches, in hallways, basements, stairways, etc. and it will create a safety hazard.

Gail Labelle of 105 Walnut Street and Secretary of the Rental Housing Association -

Ms. Labelle echoed the comments of the previous speakers and said that she agreed with everyone's comments. She said that she is the secretary of the Rental Housing Association and said that only a small percentage of the members operate the apartments on a commercial level, noting that many members own a very small number of units. She stressed that the apartment building owners care about their buildings and want the best for their buildings, their tenants and the City as a whole. Many of the building owners are not wealthy people and can not absorb the trash collection fee as a business expense and will need to pass this fee along to their tenants in the form of a rent increase.

With no additional members of the public wishing to address the Council regarding the proposed municipal budget, Mayor Raymond then closed the public hearing at 6:55pm.

The Council then took a ten minute recess. Following the break, the Council began a budget workshop and reviewed various department budgets. No action was taken on the proposed budgets at this time.

**VOTE (1)**

Motion by Councilor Mason, seconded by Councilor Jean:

To adjourn at 8:45 p.m. Passed - Vote 7-0

A true record, Attest:

Kathleen M. Montejo, CMC  
City Clerk  
Lewiston, Maine