



KELLY WILKINSON / The Star

SPEAKING OUT: Residents waiting to address the City-County Council applauded Monday after Jessica Green (back to camera) spoke about Noble of Indiana, a group serving people with developmental disabilities.

Budget hearing draws crowd

By Brendan O'Shaughnessy

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Jay Allen said he had never come to a City-County Council meeting in his life before Monday night.

But the retired manufacturer's representative said he was finally motivated to attend because taxes on the house he bought 12 years ago have quadrupled to more than \$4,000. He said no one wants to buy the house anymore, so his lifetime's investment has lost much of its worth.

"My taxes during your watch have gone to the point where I can't afford to live there anymore," Allen told the council. "I know you want to deflect responsibility, but it happened on your watch."

He asked the council to cut spending.

Allen was among a few dozen taxpayers who testified at the full council meeting on the city's \$1 billion budget. The council is scheduled to vote on the budget at its Sept. 17 meeting.

In past years, budget hearings have drawn as few as two people who signed up to speak about city priorities. But drastic increases in property and income taxes have led to a keen interest in local spending, and confrontations and ejections have disrupted recent council meetings.

While the proposed budget would increase spending by only \$3.1 million next year, some residents noted that the tax revenues next year would increase by about \$120 million. The 2008 budget is based on using a 65 percent income tax increase to substitute for borrowed and one-time revenues and to provide a \$50 million reduction in property taxes.

Greg Ballard, the Republican

SECOND CHANCE

If you could not make the public hearing, the council offers two ways to provide input online. Budget Talk is a comment site, and a Budget Survey asks a series of questions about spending priorities. Both are available on the council's Web site, www.indygov.org/council.

candidate challenging Mayor Bart Peterson, said budget spending should be limited to the rate of inflation. He asked council members to waive their pay for the rest of the year as a show of support for struggling taxpayers.

Kathie Church recited statistics about the growing rate of foreclosures in Marion County, which have soared in the past five years. Indianapolis saw 1,693 foreclosures filed in July and has been ranked in the top three cities in the nation for foreclosures the past two years.

She said property tax increases will send the rates even higher and leave more taxes for others to pay.

"We need to look at what's happening in the real world," Church said.

Jack Borgerding, a former council fiscal analyst, said Peterson's effort to cut \$13 million from the budget was an example of "old think." He asked the council to consider across-the-board cuts of 10 percent. His own taxes soared from \$2,200 to nearly \$15,000.

"I believe, collectively, we can do this, but we have to have the will," Borgerding said.

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