FY2009 Budget

Report on Citizen Input

Background

Over the past few years, the Peoria City Council has consistently stated that the process for developing and adopting a budget should be transparent and based on citizen input. Traditionally, however, formal public input has been limited to one of the final nights of the budget process – at a moment when no amount of public input would likely be successful in influencing opinion.

Recognizing this fundamental dichotomy between the desire for input and a structure that discouraged it, the Council charged staff with creating a budget process that sought *meaningful* citizen input on budget priorities earlier in the process. To accomplish this goal, staff presented Council with an aggressive plan. On Monday, August 4, staff organized two public events: one at Exposition Gardens and one at the Peoria City/County Health Department. Organized as "drop-in" open houses, the sessions allowed citizens to learn more about the City's budget, ask questions of City staff, and discuss issues with members of the City Council.

In addition to informal conversations, attendees were asked to complete a questionnaire that attempted to capture their personal priorities. The questionnaire contained four questions:

1. Where would you like to see your City tax dollars invested? Answers may include broad areas of emphasis or specific ideas.
2. What are your ideas for additional revenue sources for the City?
3. How do you think the City could save money?
4. How else could the City better use your tax dollars? Use this space to tell us anything else that did not fit above or to give us additional suggestions.

Anticipating that attendance at the open houses would be limited, staff also made this questionnaire available on-line between August 1 and August 10.

Raw Results

A total of 116 questionnaires were submitted – 98 on-line and 18 submitted at the open houses. Additionally, one citizen submitted his thoughts in essay form. The results were:

- 391 suggestions on where City tax dollars should be invested;
- 203 recommendations concerning additional or increased revenue sources;
- 182 idea regarding ways the City could reduce costs; and
- 78 additional comments.

This new approach produced a dramatically greater amount of public input than that received during the FY2008 Budget discussions. Not accounting for informal conversations between citizens, members of the Council and staff, formal public input for last year's budget was limited to two citizen comments at that November 20, 2007 Council Meeting. This likely represented less than 15 minutes of input. By contrast, recent staff and Council efforts to engage the public resulted in a seventy-fold increase in the amount of input. If the average citizen took ten minutes to complete the questionnaire, staff estimates that the results represent 19.33 hours of testimony.