

Omaha Together One Community

OUR CITY BUDGET PRIORITIES

“Seek the welfare of the city where you are...for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”
- Jeremiah 29:7

Our tax dollars provide essential public investment to ensure the operation of our city. Our taxes fund the **city operating budget** that pays for essential city services like police, fire, libraries, etc. In addition, we pay taxes so the city can pay back on borrowed funds (bonds) in the **capital improvements budget** (roads, sewers, buildings etc). Whose interests are reflected in the city budget priorities? Whose projects are included in the capital improvements plan? Are the issues affecting our families, congregations, and neighborhoods represented in the city’s funding discussions?

Over the past 10 years, OTOC has brought the power of organized people to the decision making table around a number of issues in the **city operating budget** which surfaced through concerns shared in house meetings:

- **LIBRARIES:** When Omaha’s funding for libraries is compared with similar cities across the nation, we rank near the bottom in funding per person. Budget cuts mean in 2006 the library will spend less than in 2005, 2004, or 2003. OTOC’s work on the library budget has succeeded in increasing branch hours and making the system county-wide.
- **POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS:** Since the creation of the office 4 years ago, the Public Safety Auditor has replaced allegations between police and citizens with data. It was OTOC research and public action which helped establish this position in 2000. Public support is strong (all across the city), but so is police union opposition. The city council cut from the 2006 budget all public funding of the Auditor. The mayor has promised to add the Auditor to his staff for the coming year, but the long term independence and effectiveness of the office will require city funds and city commitment.

The City of Omaha’s **capital improvement budget** is paid for with your taxes plus funds the city borrows. City spending on projects so large that debt is used to pay for them—with payments spread over 20 or 30 years—is financed through bond issues. This funding is similar to a family’s mortgage on a house.

Infrastructure is sorely neglected in Omaha’s older neighborhoods with the combined sewer system being a prime example. The city is spending about \$8.5 million annually to separate combined sewers. This amount is a fraction of the estimated \$500 million needed to solve the problem.

The Qwest Center is booking less than 30% of the conventions projected. Thus, tax revenues to the city from conventioners are too low to pay off the debt. For example, state turnback funding is running at about 10% of projections. In addition, hotel profits at the convention center are too low to pay off the hotel debt.

A new bond issue is proposed for next year by the mayor. What projects should be funded by this loan? Should sewer separation be stepped up? ***What projects in your part of the city need to be top priority?***