



Neighborhood Meeting with City Council

Market Neighborhood

Submitted Questions/Comments (24)

Meeting Date: May 20, 2009



Finance

1. Is the City Council being a good steward of public finances?

Response: *The City Council has adopted prudent and conservative financial policies that provide the City with tools to respond to changes in economic conditions in a deliberate and planned manner. One measure of the City's financial strength is the credit rating of the City's debt. On November 17, 2008, Standard & Poor's upgraded the City's Water and Sewer Revenue Bonds from "AA-" to "AAA" and on November 24, 2008, upgraded the City's General Obligation Bonds from "AA-" to "AAA," which is the highest rating by S&P.*

2. Is the Council discussing a possible tax increase?

Response: *The adopted budget assumed a 1.5% increase in the private utility tax rate (from 6% to 7.5%) on the ballot in 2009 as part of balancing the 2010 budget. The City Council will be discussing this action during June and July and would need to take action by the first meeting in August to place the question on the November 2009 General election ballot.*

3. How is the City tightening its belt?

Response: *As part of the 2009-2010 budget, the City reduced expenditures by over \$4 million, by reducing selected service levels and curtailing expenses, which included staff reductions as described below. In response to current economic conditions, the City is pursuing a 7-part strategy that includes further expenditure reductions, use of cash reserves, compensation adjustments, and work schedule reductions. For example, several of the City's labor unions (and management) have agreed to forego cost of living increases in 2010 and discussions are continuing with the other labor unions. The concessions to date total over \$1 million in cost reduction for 2010.*

4. How many positions have been laid off?

Response: *As part of the 2009-2010 budget, the City reduced its workforce by eliminating 8 temporary positions (2 of which were vacant) and 4 regular positions (3 of which were vacant), reducing several positions from full-time to part-time status (equivalent to 1.7 positions), and cutting back on the use of seasonal, hourly, and intern labor equivalent to over 14 positions. In response to current economic conditions, further reductions may be necessary.*

5. Which is your job as council member: to provide protection to its citizens and if so please define what is too little, too much and where we are now OR to provide enhancements to citizens in which case define what that would be to you describing what is too little, too much and where we are now.

Response: *The Association of Washington Cities and Municipal Research and Services Center publish a Councilmember's handbook that broadly defines the job of a councilmember as follows: "The principal job of a city or town council is to make policy. A policy is a course of action for a community. Policy-making often takes the form of passing ordinances or resolutions. After policy decisions are made by the legislative body, others perform the administrative task of implementing the policies." Each councilmember approaches this role differently and they will be in attendance at the meeting and available to discuss their individual approach.*

6. Assuming your projections are incorrect and budget shortfalls will be more than anticipated, what exactly are you going to do to reign in the budget and when? What will be its effect?

Response: *There is no consensus among economists on when and how the economic downturn will end and recovery will begin. As mentioned in the response to question 17, the City is pursuing a 7-part budget balancing strategy. Some of the elements will be held in reserve, in case financial outcomes are worse than currently projected. For example, no use of the City's Rainy Day reserve (\$2.7 million) is currently planned, leaving this amount in reserve against worsening financial conditions. Similarly, furloughs are not expected based on current projections, but could be considered if conditions deteriorate further.*

7. Please bring the P&I or latest monthly financials against budget to the meeting on 5/20.

Response: The first quarter Financial Management Report (FMR) will be available at the May 20 meeting. These quarterly reports are available on-line at the City's website (search for "Financial Status Reports").

Annexation

8. What has changed to change our minds?

Response: Annexation of unincorporated urban "islands" is one of the underlying principles of the State's Growth Management Act. Cities such as Kirkland that have these urban islands assigned to them are responsible for annexing the territory. The City Council has been studying the potential annexation for several years. Much of the discussion has focused on the financial implications. Over the years, the financial picture changed. Last year, the City Council put the annexation study on hold until the City could deal with our own budget challenges. The Council made the commitment to revisit annexation to determine whether the actions taken to balance the City budget created a different financial outcome for annexation. The actions taken by the City Council to balance the 2009-2010 Budget did improve the financial outcome for annexation and actions the City Council takes to balance its own budget will also support the annexation area. At this point, a majority of the Council believes that the annexation is within the City's financial reach without causing undue harm to the City's own financial picture and that it is now time to move to the next step to seriously consider annexation.

9. What is in it for us?

Response: Annexation is a responsibility of the cities within King County that have unincorporated areas assigned to them. Annexation of Kirkland's Potential Annexation Area (PAA) will increase the City's population to a level that provides a higher level of visibility and influence on regional issues that impact the community. Adequate Police service in cities adjoining Kirkland improves public safety within the City itself.

10. Is it a good business decision?

Response: The Council believes that it is a sound business decision at this point. Redevelopment potential in the annexation area is high in the long term which will help the overall City's financial base.

Public Safety

11. Are crime statistics going up?

Response: The City of Kirkland is a safe place to live. While there have been increases in some crime categories, we have also experienced reductions in other areas. It is important to remember that due to Kirkland's relatively low instances of violent crimes, any percentage change will seem significant. For instance our statistics reflect a 75% increase in aggravated assaults resulting from bar fights. This percentage of increase may seem alarming at first glance, but closer examination revealed that in 2007 we had 4 such instances and in 2008 we had 7 instances for the entire City of Kirkland. The City of Kirkland is a safe place to live and the safety of our community is our top priority. We continue to monitor crime statistics looking for significant trends. If/when one is identified we will assign resources to address the trend in order to keep Kirkland a safe community.

12. Why are we reading more and more about crime in Kirkland?

Response: In an effort to better communicate with our community and enhance our relationships with the media, the Kirkland Police Department has created a Public Information Officer position. The duties of this position are performed by our Community Services Unit Sergeant (CSU) and one of the objectives is to decrease victimization through increased community awareness. This philosophy and our relationship with the media have led to greater community awareness.

13. Are we under staffed in the Police Department?

Response: No, the Police Department is not understaffed. The staffing levels in the Police Department have increased as our population has increased, allowing the Police to continue delivering a high level of service. The ability to serve our community is reflected in the high satisfaction ratings our Police Department continues to receive in the community surveys. Simply adding more police officers is not always the solution to effective community policing. The Police Department has also implemented crime fighting strategies which allow them to be more efficient and use the public's resources in the most effective manner.

14. What is being done to address public safety in Peter Kirk and Heritage Parks?

Response: Peter Kirk Park and Heritage Park are safe and generate very few police calls for service. The Police Department conspicuously patrols these areas with uniformed officers as well as our Pro-Act Unit to provide a greater police presence and proactively prevent crime. The beauty and convenient location of our parks generate heavy community use, especially with youth. The high volume of use and the concentration of youth can create a perception of crime which is very often unfounded. The Police attempt to impact these perceptions by walking through these areas on foot and visibly interact with the park users. The Police Department and the Parks Department also worked collaboratively to develop strategies to help mitigate these perceptions.

Downtown and Businesses

15. How do we keep Kirkland from looking like a ghost town?

Response: We work with organizations and businesses to provide programs and events for downtown. This past year the City Council made the Kirkland Downtown Association a partner agency – so to the extent that the budget allows, that organization will receive city funds to do work that would otherwise be accomplished by the City. The KDA mission is to promote downtown and it has used the last several months to retool (following the departure of a longtime director) to improve internal operations and to work with retailers and other stakeholders to coordinate on programs that help downtown. The KDA is working with retailers to dress up temporarily vacant storefronts. The Cultural Council has stepped up to partially fund the Artist's Studio Tour and the Seattle International Film Festival, two events that bring people to Kirkland. Kirkland Uncorked (July 17–19), a major summer celebration, received LTAC funding along with other activating events. LTAC funds also ensure that the region (most of our visitors are from within 50 miles of Kirkland) is aware of other events that are happening in Kirkland.

16. Why so many store closures?

Response: Kirkland is not exempt from the recession that has hit the region and nation especially in the retail arena. We are some 20% down in retail sales tax collected. Merchants have always had a tough time through the winter months and the snow during the holiday did not help matters.

17. What is Kirkland First (buy Kirkland) doing to help Kirkland businesses? What is the City doing to help?

Response: Kirkland First.org is a buy local program that will be launched in a few weeks and will offer an electronic directory of Kirkland businesses. Any business licensed and located in Kirkland can get a free listing on this site. Projected enhancements will include: advertising, business to business and business to customer transactions, information about events, seminars, and sales that are important to the Kirkland community. The City funded this with State of Washington Department of Community trade and economic development (CTED) money—we anticipate a private entity will take it over in 2010 but the City will continue to participate in the program.

18. What zoning changes were made in downtown Kirkland?

Response: In 2009, two developments that were approved by the Design Review Board were appealed to the City Council. In reviewing those applications, the City Council concluded that the zoning regulations for the Central Business District-1 and Central Business District-2 zones needed clarification. In late 2008, the Council adopted a temporary ordinance to limit development, while the Council proceeded to review the regulations with the intent of making the regulations more accurately reflect the policies in the Comprehensive Plan. Major revisions included regulations for: wider sidewalks; specific upper story setbacks; prohibiting ground floor banks on some streets; specifying ground floor retail heights; allowing some additional upper story floor area as a tradeoff for public open space; and requiring a minimum depth for ground floor retail uses.

19. Have these changes prompted commercial real estate owners to put their properties up for sale?

Response: We are not aware of any properties for sale specifically as a result of the revised regulations. The real estate market in general is depressed so it would be hard to measure the effect of the new regulations.

20. What is the status of current redevelopments?

Response: As noted above, there is little new development activity, but there is some activity on developments that were started earlier. The redevelopment of the Bank of America property is moving ahead. Approval of the final building permits for the site is likely to occur in the next several weeks. The Bank of America will move to the adjacent Merrill Gardens building immediately to the east. Look for construction to begin this spring or summer. Plans are being revised for the McLeod property where the Hector's building is located. Late last year a large four story office building was approved, but it now appears that the applicant will be rethinking those plans and considering a more phased and smaller scale approach to developing the property. Finally, a rezone of the Park Place property was approved late in 2008. The applicant has indicated his intent to continue work on the project, although little is likely to happen until the economy improves. The project is now under review by the Design Review Board.

21. Why did the City change the downtown parking regulations? Will it help Kirkland businesses?

Response: The changes only occurred in the two downtown parking lots for a few reasons. The peak hours for parking occur during the lunch period, but mostly in the evenings and of course are weather-driven. The occupancy on-street and in the parking lots are nearly 100% in these peak times. Pay parking naturally creates turnover which is good for those who want closer, more convenient parking, but it also gives the businesses the turnover they need especially those with restaurants. The 9am – 5pm 3-hour time limit change has been well received by all the businesses as their customers now have freedom to visit more than one type of business without worrying about time restraints.

22. Thanks to the City Council for your hard work—public service at the local level is often a thankless job. I looked at the "Commute Trip Reduction Ordinance." This tells me Kirkland is serious about taking any steps that would help reduce the number of cars on the road. I am a small business owner on Market St. One of my employees biked to work but stopped after complaints from another co-worker in regard to body odor. He then started driving back and forth from his home in Capital Hill. Also, I do not bicycle to work for the same reason—no shower. The owner of the building might be willing to renovate the bathrooms to create a shower if he had any monetary incentives. I cannot afford to install a shower on my own. Would Kirkland be interested in starting a "Pilot program"? I would volunteer my business and talk to the building owner. He's real "hands on" when it comes to the care and maintenance of the building—and I can see where there is existing room for such a renovation. Perhaps we can brainstorm some type of program with incentives, matching funds and/or grants. I think it's such a simple solution to removing cars from the road. Thanks for your help.

Response: Right now the City doesn't have any funds available to help employers make improvements to their buildings. It's conceivable that the City might be able to apply for some kind of grant to promote bicycling where the funds could be used in this way and we'll look for such an opportunity in the future. If you'd like to discuss this further, please call David Godfrey in the Public Works Department at (425) 587-3865.

Kirkland vision

- 23. How do we bring the neighborhood associations and businesses together? There seems to be a disconnect. How is the City Council addressing this disconnect? Do we need better cooperation and a shared vision of the future?**

***Response:** The City Council began a process of updating its vision statement and identifying strategic goals for the community. Although this process may not directly address the perceived disconnect between neighborhoods and businesses, it may help provide clarity about the City Council's goals for the community. Once the strategic goals are finalized, the City Council plans to conduct outreach in the community to share the strategic vision and promote a common vision for the community.*

Water Quality

- 24. Will the City consider funding a water quality monitoring laboratory to monitor the water Kirkland residents receive in their pipes?**

***Response:** Currently, all of the City's water quality monitoring is provided by Seattle Public Utilities and is paid for by our customers through their water rates. Samples are taken weekly from various sites throughout our system to check for chlorine residual levels and to monitor for coliform. The frequency and number of samples taken is regulated by the Washington State Department of Health and the Environmental Protection Agency to assure that our drinking water is safe for consumption. Additional information about our water system is also included in our Annual Water Quality report which will be mailed to all of our customers the week of May 4.*