

State of Missoula address Q & A  
Jan. 27, 2009

Mayor John Engen

Q: Faced with a zero reserve growth or even a shrinking budget, what steps are being taken by local government to maintain a constant level of essential services while controlling personnel and administrative costs?

A: Our 2009 budget was completed and adopted by the City Council in August. Shortly after that, news from the state Department of Revenue told us that the revenue we expected was not there. We regrouped and found approximately \$1.5 million in savings.

We need to make sure we have a strong cash balance in 2009 so we aren't upside-down in 2010.

We don't know what's going to happen. We don't know where the bottom is. We'll continue to do what we need to do to insure that we're delivering services in the most efficient way we can.

Q: With housing costs beyond the means of many of Missoula's work force members and the precipitous decline in the construction industry, has there been any consideration to a temporary abatement of impact and other construction fees?

A: We have those fees because new construction has impacts on the community, and that new construction doesn't completely pay for those impacts. Because we've worked to compromise with builders, we don't charge what we could. Impact fees are a small part of the cost of residential construction. We depend on a mix of taxes and fees to support new construction, and we respect the people who've paid those fees and taxes in full in past years.

I don't think that compromise of the public good is a good response to tough times.

Q: What are your thoughts on the need for and the location of a year-round, all-weather exposition center for Missoula?

A: We are of the same mind as the County. We support and commend the Chamber for taking this on as a priority and look forward to participating in the process. We hope this enterprise can bring financial sustainability to the Western Montana Fair. We agree with the County that this effort has to come from the private sector.

Q: Are there initiatives underway to attract new high-quality jobs to Missoula? And how is the need for commercial space being assessed during the zoning and UFDA update/review process?

A: During my first year as mayor, I attended a fascinating conference on urban design in Charleston, South Carolina. One of the things we learned was that without a downtown master plan, your community has a hole in it. Today, we're well into the process toward a finished Downtown Master Plan.

We follow up on leads through the Missoula Area Economic Development Corporation and our other economic development agencies. Through our brownfields program, we're developing a multi-use site for commercial and residential development in the heart of the city.

We're always looking for opportunities.

Q: The Russell Street Project. Can you give us an update and a prediction for where it goes from here?

A: The Environmental Impact Statement for the project is now in its draft form. You can see it by connecting to the City's Web site. Our City Council has authorized a peer review of its findings. We've heard from hundreds of folks with their opinions about what ought to happen there. We're hoping for a final EIS late this coming summer.