

## **Councilor At Large Kevin Jourdain's Message on FY 24 Budget Vote**

Dear Friends,

Hope you are all enjoying your Summer!

The Holyoke City Council had a very busy June and just before the month closed we took our annual vote on the budget. I wanted to share with you some thoughts on it.

The Holyoke City Council recently approved a budget totaling \$187 million for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024. I was one of three Councilors to vote 'no'. Here's why I voted against the budget:

I believe this budget is bad for seniors and working families, who are struggling amidst difficult economic times. This budget as-passed will result in a 4.7% tax increase for Holyoke residents. With inflation driving the cost of groceries, rents, and other basic necessities out-of-control, our residents are being squeezed like never before. I cannot in good conscience add to their burden even further with such a large tax increase. Enough is enough.

Beyond that, I believe the budget represents poor fiscal planning and practices.

First, the budget presented to the City Council again this year is not a complete statement of anticipated revenues and expenditures for the fiscal year (which is what a budget is supposed to be). We have been told to expect future supplemental budgets to account for changes in revenue and additional spending needs. While there are times this process might be unavoidable, I cannot support a budget which is known at the outset to be incomplete.

Second, the budget perpetuates a very large structural deficit. Specifically, our city is spending more money than we have available, and gaps are being filled by using temporary, one time federal funds. This is a bad practice that's going to get our city into trouble, because these federal funds will run out next year! Other cities, such as Chicopee, used portions of the federal funding they received to save for a rainy day, but Holyoke spent its entire federal allotment on operating expenses. I believe this practice is irresponsible and we should be planning better now to avoid future problems.

Third, I disagree with the proposal to spend \$900,000 to clean up the City Treasurer's office by using high-priced consultants to reform and establish best practices. I believe the Council and Mayor should take action on a number of proposals to improve the operation of this office prior to dedicating additional spending to fix systemic issues. The Council has been promised multiple times the "office is getting cleaned up" yet it does not happen. Moreover, when we allocated nearly 300K last year for another clean up, the Council was not told they would be requesting 600K more over the next 2 years. We shouldn't be spending more money until these basic problems are fixed and there has been more transparency around funds already spent. Other cities are not spending these kinds of funds for repeated "clean ups."

Finally, I would like to point out that our state's allocation of unrestricted Local Aid to Holyoke is radically below the challenges our city currently faces, including environmental needs and serving the needs of socio-economically challenged residents. While this allocation is not within the control of the Council, it is up to the Council to properly plan around this chronic under-funding by Boston-centric state officials. In my opinion, this budget isn't up to the task.

I would like to thank my fellow City Councilors Vacon and Puello for joining me in voting against this year's budget and calling for better, more responsible fiscal planning for our city. My highest priority is always standing up for our city's residents, their safety, and their economic prosperity, and I am proud to do so even when it means voting 'no'. That's what leadership is all about.

Best regards,

*Kevin*

Kevin A. Jourdain  
Councilor At Large