

High Point Civic Association
Sandy Springs, Georgia
www.HighPointCivic.com

To preserve and enhance the integrity of our neighborhood by maintaining a consistent and unified adherence to sound land use.



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Archive for February, 2009

[City of Sandy Springs is Financially Sound!](#)

Saturday, February 21st, 2009

In these times of economic doom and gloom, I am pleased to report that our City is financially sound. We are not cutting services, jobs, or capital projects. We are not tapping into our fully funded 16% reserve fund. We are not looking to the federal government for a handout like City of Atlanta, the state of California or the Big 3 Automakers. We are not looking to you the taxpayer for more money to prop up government.

We are looking to the future. In that vein, we did vote to purchase the Target site for a future City Hall last night. In tight economic markets, cash is king and you can buy low. Over the last two budget cycles we have put money away for land purchases so we had the cash on hand without reducing services or capital projects. The \$8 million for the site is an extremely good deal for the location in the heart of Sandy Springs. We will pay ½ of what the property was originally marketed for. We are not ready to build on the site, but now that we own it we have several options for temporary use until the economy improves and we finance a buildout. I believe that this will create synergy in that area to spur further redevelopment in the heart of Sandy Springs. At the end of this email you will find the financials for the buildout.

While this email is rather long and filled with numbers, I have never been fond of soundbites, I hope you will spend some time looking at it. I prefer for you to actually have all the information and then you can make up your own quippy soundbite.

Since inception in 2005, we took a different path from other governments. We outsourced most traditional government jobs – public works, planning and zoning, and back office administration – to a private company with a set price for performance. For our traditional employees – police and fire employees – we set up a 401(k)'s instead of defined benefit packages. We introduced them to health savings accounts instead of money sucking traditional health plans.

During Budget season, we anticipated the downturn in the economy and planned ahead. We downgraded revenue streams for sales tax receipts and for construction permits.

The September YTD variance budget to actual is \$408k favorable.

Sales taxes are 0.4% favorable (dead-on)

- Budget assumed a 4% decrease

Community Development is 6.9% unfavorable

- Budget assumed a 21% decrease
- Building permits are the primary driver with 9.2% unfavorable
- Primary reasons are the housing surplus and weak economy

Real-estate transfer and intangible is 8.7% unfavorable

- Primary reasons are the housing surplus and weak economy

We will continue to watch expenditures as the budget year continues.

Holding department heads accountable for costs in their respective areas

Adhering to the 16% fund balance reserve policy

Not using one-time revenue sources for ongoing expenses.

Balancing current year revenue with current year expenses.

We are doing all of this by living within our legislatively mandated revenue caps. The City of Sandy Springs has a 4.731 Millage Rate Cap. In addition to the millage rate cap, we have a 3% cap on residential reassessments. This is important to note because the legislature is considering this for all counties and cities in Georgia. We already operate under this restriction without detriment to our budget.

September Financial Statement Overview

Please find the September financial statements for your review.

Revenues:

The chart on the right reflects the dollar variance of YTD actual to budget of each revenue category.

(For example: Sep YTD Revenues exceed the planned Budget by \$408k and Real/Personal Property Tax represents \$653k of that total.

Local Option Sales Tax: Collections are consistent with budget projections. (< 1% of budgeted projection)

Business & Occupational Tax: Collections are consistent with budget projections.

Franchise Fees: Remittances are consistent with budget projections.

Insurance Premium Tax: N/A. (Premium is payable in October)

All Other: (Primary drivers)

Municipal Court Fines: Court services stronger than originally anticipated.

(September reflects only three weeks of court revenue due to mandatory Judge training.)

Recreation Program Fees: Programming revenue increasing as new programs come online.

Building Permits: Shortfall caused by housing surplus and weak economy. (Budget included a 21% reduction)

Real Estate Transfer Tax: Lagging projection due to weak economy.

Recording Intangible Tax: Lagging projection due to weak economy.

Wholesale Beverage Tax: Lagging projection due to weak economy.

September Financial Statement Overview

Expenditures:

The chart on the right reflects the dollar variance of YTD actual to budget of each department.

(For example: Sep YTD Expenditures are less than the planned Budget by \$1.6M and Police represents \$753k of that total)

Police:

Primarily reflects vacancy related savings in salary & benefits, and timing of expenditures for jail services and the gasoline expenses re-classed to the previous year since this is paid a month in arrears.

Fire

Primarily reflects vacancy related savings in salary & benefits, and timing of expenditures for machinery and equipment (Reserve pumper), uniforms and ems supplies. They also have gasoline expenses re-classed to the previous year since this is paid a month in arrears.

Recreation:

Primarily reflects the timing of expenditures for the tennis center renovations that should be complete in the next month and the start-up of recreational programs.

Legal Services:

Primarily reflects lower litigation fees with majority of cases being handled under the GIRMA insurance policy.

Community Development:

Primarily reflects vacancy related savings.

All Other: (Primary Drivers)

City Manager:

Primarily reflects timing of expenditures for contractual services.

General Operations:

Primarily reflects timing of expenditures for workers compensation and wellness program.

Facilities and Buildings:

Primarily reflects savings from building operations and security services.

Municipal Court:

Primarily reflects vacancy related savings in salary & benefits and timing of remaining expenditures

Target Buildout Financials

When we do decide to buildout the Target site, there are some financials to consider.

We currently have a Capital Budget of \$17 million. This is the portion of our budget where we fund road repaving, parks improvements, sidewalks and the like.

We also have a General Budget. Within the General Budget are things like our leases for the City Hall at the Morgan Falls Property and the lease for the Police Department at Cousins.

We have three major capital projects we are looking at:

1. Hammond Park
2. City Hall
3. Police Department/Courthouse

Let's assume Hammond is \$20 M to rebuild. 15 year debt financed at 6% is \$2,025,000/yr

Let's assume City Hall is \$25 M to build. (Space Needs assessment of 70,000 sf) 15 year debt financed at 6% is \$2,500,000/yr

Let's assume Police/Court are relocated to Fulton County Annex (which we will have to purchase) and we refurbish at \$31 M. (Space Needs assessment of 58,000 sf) 15 year debt financed at 6% is \$3,100,000/yr.

We will take the \$17 M and subtract \$7.5 M annually for the recurring debt. That drops us to \$9.5 M annually to allocate to new projects.

We have to add back to the \$9.5 M the leases we would have been paying on the Morgan Falls property and the Cousins property - \$1.5 M.

We are now at \$11 M to allocate to new projects.

We also had a one time startup cost of \$3M for the 911 Center in the General Fund this year. We move that \$3M from the General Fund into the Capital Fund.

We are now at \$14 M to allocate to new projects.

We had been allocating \$2.75 M/yr into a Facilities fund. We can now reprogram that money for capital projects.

We are now at \$16.75 M to allocate to new projects.

Operational Expenses will remain constant for operation of City Hall and Police even in a new facility. The only new project that will have an increase in Operational expense is Hammond Park. We won't know the operational costs until we have decided what to put in the building.

As you can see, we can still build out the Target without lowering the services we offer or cutting back on traditional capital projects like parks improvements, paving, sidewalks and intersection improvements.

I know there are naysayers out there who claim the sky is falling and your government is going to pick your pocket for more money. I can't speak for the County, State or Federal Governments, but Sandy Springs can make it on our tiny little portion of the tax bill and still plan for the future.

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[Get to Know Highpoint Elementary School at Prospective Student Events](#)

Saturday, February 21st, 2009

PROSPECTIVE STUDENT EVENTS at High Point Elementary School,

Lunch on Fri., March 6th & Coffee on Tues., March 10th.

Interested parents, students, and siblings were welcomed at two prospective student events at High Point Elementary School! Take a few minutes to read the update below from HPCA School Committee Chair, Brittany Charron.

Greetings and happy 2009! I wanted to quickly update you on your neighborhood school, High Point Elementary. My husband and I are just delighted with the experience our daughter is having. She LOVES High Point and is ready to go to school each day. It warms my heart when she gets off the bus each afternoon and pronounces the day "great!" Like all parents of kindergartners, we are astounded by what our child is learning. The Charron family is not the only family that feels this way. Other neighborhood families are delighted with the challenging education and the positive, nurturing environment that High Point offers. Just ask a neighbor!

So far this year, we have enjoyed the amazing Fall Festival, attended Math Night (hands-on activities that involve the students but educate the parents on the math curriculum), Bingo night, a school dance, the Fall Sing, Christmas Sing-Along, and a first rate performance of Willy Wonka. Our daughter went on a field trip to the Aquarium with the other kindergarten classes, has enjoyed plays and presentations at school, been on the televised morning news, and most recently learned about Chinese New Year from the parents of one of her buddies!

John and I both enjoy visiting the classroom to read a story, help with an experiment or cooking demo, or just observing. Lunch in the cafeteria with my daughter is always a great change from our daily routines. GREAT stuff is going in my daughter's classroom and the teacher in me (I used to teach 8th grade) leaves the building after every visit KNOWING that we made the right decision to go to High Point.

What makes High Point so good? There are too many things to list. I could say that it is Lisa Nash and Renee Prior, the amazing principal and assistant principal. Perhaps it is the lovely ladies who work at the reception counter when I walk into the school. Maybe it is the lunchroom ladies who make my daughter giggle. It could be Carrie Pitchford who carefully and purposely places students in class and knows the curriculum backwards and forwards. Perhaps it is the ladies in the Media Center who help my daughter when she goes there for Accelerated Reader or to check-out a book. Certainly there are the talented teachers who teach art, music, computer, and PE. And dare I forget my daughter's two teachers who have apparently hung the moon?!?! And maybe it is all of the people at High Point who clearly love their job and believe in what they are doing. There is a tremendous sense of camaraderie there and the students feel it!

Principal's Prospective Parent Coffee Held on Tuesday, March 10 at 8:00 AM.

Please take advantage of the school tours, offered two Fridays a month at 9:30. Contact the school at 404.843.7716 for details. They are well worth the investment of your time.

As always, please contact the school with questions. I can also put you in touch with many other happy families! Thank you for your support and the time you spent reading this email. It is greatly appreciated!

Warm Regards,

Brittany Charron

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[GDOT Planning to Revamp 400/I-85 - Open Mtg. Thurs., 2/26/09](#)

Saturday, February 21st, 2009

HPCA/Community Member: Interested in GDOT discussion/planning for revamping 400/I-85 intersection? Open meeting this Thursday, 2/26, afternoon... (If you attend, please share info with us... thanks!)

GA 400/I-85 Connector Ramps - PIOH* Meeting

2/26/2009 4:00 PM to 7:00 PM

St. Phillips Cathedral, 2744 Peachtree Rd., Atlanta, GA 30305

Project Number: NH-000-0085-02(153) P.I.Number: 762380 County: Fulton

* PIOH - public information open house