

A Budget For A

# Stronger Memphis



## Speaker's Notes

for 2017-18 budget proposal presentation to the Memphis City Council

April 25, 2017

*Mayor Jim Strickland*

A year ago, I stood here and delivered my first budget proposal. And not even two months later, you all set what has to be a Memphis record -- unanimous votes for our budgets, all in about seven minutes.

Now, I'm not going to stand here today and challenge you to beat that record. That might be asking too much -- especially since this year's budget was much more challenging to assemble than last year's. But I am asking you to join with me through these next few weeks and show that same spirit of collaboration that led us to this same place last year. I pledge that to you today, on our end.

I ask that because collaboration isn't just good for our stress levels. It's good for all of Memphis -- showing our citizens that City Hall can work for our collective good. Because if

Memphians don't have faith and confidence in government, there's not much we can get done up here. Together, we can give them reasons to be confident this budget season.

Last year, we laid a foundation -- both with that collaborative spirit, and an adopted budget that defined what we mean when we say "brilliant at the basics." This budget proposal continues on this foundation and moves forward -- making ours a **STRONGER MEMPHIS** by sustaining that reorganization around core city services, by increasing what we do for our young people, by strengthening public safety, and by being the responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars that we all must be.

Briefly, I want to hit the highlights:

First, and most importantly, the future of our city is only as strong as our young people. That's why this budget provides **more opportunities for our youth**. Some examples:

- We're **expanding hours** at our libraries -- including re-opening 10 branches on Fridays after they've been closed on that day for many years.
- We're **helping kids learn to read**. All 24 of our summer camps this year will now have a literacy component, increasing from the seven we did last year. And our libraries are beginning an interactive reading program in four of its branches.
- We're **giving young people productive outlets**. Our libraries will continue their quest to expand teen programming, which increased dramatically last year. Next spring, we'll continue spring break camps.
- And we're **giving young people opportunities**. We will sustain the 1,400 young people whose eyes we open with our two jobs programs.

Yet we know the No. 1 job of city government is to **provide for public safety**. Here are some examples of how we'll make ours a stronger city by doing that:

- We all know by now that our administration inherited a police force with its lowest staffing level in 10 years. Changing that direction has been a major focus of all of ours.
- This budget funds pay raises for police to improve retention, increases staffing through large recruiting classes, and allocates more for overtime to concentrate our efforts in high-crime areas.
- And as we probably all know by now, nearly 20 percent of the calls that our Memphis Fire Emergency Medical Services team responds to are unnecessary -- and this year

we'll begin to reduce that number by putting into action the Smarter Cities Challenge recommendations from IBM.

- We've improved our health insurance offerings, giving all of our employees more options for their families. And although some employees, particularly fire fighters, selected policies costing the city more money, it was worth it to make our employees more satisfied.

To be a stronger Memphis, **we must take care of the fundamentals** -- be brilliant at the basics. I'll close with a few more examples of how this budget will do just that:

- We'll fill more potholes and pave more streets through \$18.5 million in street paving. That's a \$2 million increase from last year -- and almost double what the city did three years ago.
- We'll help our homeless change their lives for the better by sustaining our funding of Work Local.
- We'll help people get to work by sustaining last year's increased funding levels of MATA.
- We'll continue to solidify our financial health and our retirees' benefits by funding 88 percent of our actuarial required contribution (ARC) to our pension fund. That's ahead of the 83 percent we're required to fund this year.

We'll also invest in infrastructure and solid services by proposing modest fee increases for our storm water and sewer funds -- about \$5 per household per month. The federal consent decree, which addresses our aging infrastructure, is prompting this in part. And we'll be able to better control flooding in our city by improving our storm water system.

**But most importantly?** We can do all of this and still keep our citizens' property taxes level. This budget does not call for a property tax increase. City government must continue to maximize what we do while at the same time not placing an undue burden on our residents and not stifling the economic growth we've been seeing this past year. This budget proposal also does not dip into reserves, and it is balanced.

I'll end with this: The work we did together last year was another major step toward the improved fiscal health of this city. The rating agencies assigned us an improved outlook, and shortly after the budget passed, the state Comptroller lauded what we're doing. His

words: “If you continue on this path, Memphis will reclaim its rightful place among the truly vibrant cities of the world.” I want us to continue on that path.

But more than that, the budget you passed last year helped change lives -- and that’s why we all chose public service, right? We’re rebuilding our police department. We reduced 911 calls from a minute on average to under 13 seconds. We’ve transformed Memphis Animal Services. We’ve improved our economy for all by increasing minority and women-owned business spending by more than 30 percent.

Take **that** for data.

I know you want this positive momentum to continue. And I know you want to see other examples of things we’ve collectively turned around, too. So let’s work together the next few weeks to deliver a budget that will enable us to continue changing lives for the better in our city.