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City falls a few steps short of frugality



Submitted by [Phil Fretz](#) on April 3, 2011 - 11:26pm



[Phil Fretz's Blog](#)

A few ideas on what the next mayor can do to balance the budget without raising taxes:

Cell phones

The city is providing cell phones to 1,330 people, at a cost to taxpayers of \$928,199, according to the Mayor's Office. That's too many people, and the cost — about \$58 a month per user — is too high.

A few city employees *do* need a cell phone to be efficient. But not *that many*.

Turn off the lights

Last year, the city spent \$10.4 million on electric bills.

That isn't a typo, folks. More than \$10 million.

The city occupies approximately 9 million square feet of space, scattered across more than 500 buildings.

I'm not making this stuff up. It comes from the Mayor's Office.

The Ed Ball Building used \$688,482.82 worth of electricity last year.

The Main Library downtown? Its electric bill was \$578,754.93.

City Hall? A paltry — *relatively speaking* — \$388,932.83.

We spend \$1.66 million a year for electricity *in just three buildings*.

Folks, let's just say this isn't evidence of frugality.

Turn out some lights. Lower ceilings. Block off some empty space.

Do something.

New courthouse

Electric bills at the new courthouse (you know, the \$190 million building that's going to cost us \$350 million) are expected to run \$971,670 a year when it opens in May 2012.

Courtroom ceilings are 12- to 15-feet high. Let's lower them before the darn building even opens.

I know, I know. The National Center for State Courts says, "It is generally recommended that ceilings in all courtrooms should be at least 12 feet high."

Well, "it is generally recommended" here that the NCSC go fly a kite.

Incidentally, do you know how humongous the courthouse will be?

The downtown library is about 300,000 square feet - and that makes it the largest public library in Florida.

The new courthouse will be 800,000 square feet.

Do the math.

Did we really need something that enormous? Or did the judges just want something that enormous?

Street lights

The Mayor's Office floated the idea last year removing the bulbs in every other street light, a move that would save \$4 million a year. But, somehow satisfied that enough had been cut from the budget, it didn't pursue the matter.

Pursue it now.

I know, I know. Street lights deter crime. But how many are needed?

Pull out every other light for a couple of blocks here and there, then ask for public input.

Here's an idea: There is a street light between my house and that of my neighbor. Put half the cost of that electricity on my bill and half on his.

Then give us the option of having the bulb taken out, to cut our JEA bills, if we want. Do that citywide and save money.

Leases

The city is paying \$60,869 a month in rent on the public defender's offices at Market and Forsyth streets.

Public Defender Matt Shirk thinks that's way too much, which is why he plans on moving into the city-owned Godbold building ahead of schedule.

Good for him. But not good for whoever signed that crazy lease.

When the city must pay rent, it simply has to drive a tougher bargain.

I know it's only taxpayer money, but gosh ...

Give us a break.

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By [Luca1](#) | [04/04/11 - 12:10 am](#)

Maybe we should have city employees bring flashlights and then they can work off of battery power. How about we turn off the air conditioning and force them to work in 90 degree rooms. That will be very productive! Even employees in the private sector enjoy luxurious amenities such as lights and air conditioning. I am sure that the lights are already turned off at closing time and if they are not, that would only save an extremely small amount.

We are taking our eye off the ball here. By focusing on things such as air conditioning costs, we are ignoring the most

pressing issue facing our city-pensions. Do you think Mike Hogan is going to reform our pension system with his ringing endorsement from the police and fire unions? That is where the real cost savings are to this city, not "turning off the lights" which is completely unreasonable.

Also, how many city employees would we have to add in order to accommodate your proposal that individual homeowners determine whether the street light outside of their home is turned on at night. That seems like a royal bureaucratic mess that would require numerous employees to figure out light by light which homeowners want their light on and which want their light off.

You may think people are dumb enough to take your "government waste" bait, but not all of us are tea partiers. We know where the real savings are and they aren't in the lights.

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By **CheriCares** | [04/04/11 - 07:16 am](#)

I know the T-U is hurting financially.

The paper could save money by showing Fretz the door and replacing him with a trashcan.

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By **Humbug** | [04/04/11 - 07:35 am](#)

Waste is waste. There is an old proverb about loading up a camel with straw...

♥ Drastic budget cuts are needed to overcome drastic increases made over the last few years. - **Humbug**

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By **Westsider** | [04/04/11 - 10:58 am](#)

I don't see a tax and spend candidate like Alvin Brown making things better.

Conservative Westsider

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