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Mayor's \$4.6 million property-tax hike a shocker

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Mayor Rocky Anderson has sculpted his budget. Now it's the City Council's turn to start chiseling.

Make that sledgehammering.

Some council members are shocked the mayor's budget calls for a \$4.6 million property-tax increase for, among other things, more cops, more open space and more cultural goodies.

Salt Lake City has the state's second-highest property-tax rate, according to the **Utah Taxpayers Association**. In the first year, the new hike would add \$38 in taxes on a \$190,000 home and \$364 on a \$1 million business.

With the property-tax bump and with other fees Anderson proposes to boost - water rates, garbage collection, business licenses, cemetery and golf - the revenue increases total \$9.5 million.

"It's pretty amazing, isn't it?" Council Chairman Dave Buhler asked.

He added the council now will have to "take away all the things people think they're getting. I'm willing to do it."

"Holy cow," said Carlton Christensen, when he heard the numbers. "I knew it was high. I had no idea it was this high. It's not somebody who's being real restrained in their numbers. It's not a budget by somebody whose intent is to stay in office. I didn't sense that there were a lot of cuts to get to some equilibrium there."

In fact, Anderson - who hasn't said whether he plans to seek a third term next year - wants to add the equivalent of 44 full-time positions, including police officers, 11 positions in the Justice Court, a planner, a building inspector and an open-space coordinator.

There is little question the council will approve the property-tax increase to pay for the \$5 million bond for open space and the \$10 million bond to renovate the former Main Library to house a science, art and culture center called The Leonardo at Library Square. Voters agreed to raise their property taxes for those projects in 2003.

But the rest is up for debate. The council will start debating it Thursday.

Buhler wouldn't call the budget dead on arrival, but said he wants the council to consider a

spending plan without most of the tax increases, which would mean fewer new positions and projects.

Anderson has said the tax hike to hire eight police officers is necessary for "ensuring a safer community," noting that the federal government has gutted funding for community law enforcement. The council probably will look first to the existing budget to fund more cops.

Another one-time tax bump would help replace vests for the police SWAT team, remove 500 weak trees, buy fire equipment, create historic preservation plans, reconfigure space at City Hall for a one-stop shop to make obtaining permits easier.

The mayor proposed raising business-license fees to cover the cost of issuing the licenses. Water rates would go up to cover infrastructure improvements and garbage fees would rise to cover fuel and personnel.

Anderson proposes at least one major cut: 15 full-time employees in the golf division who work in ground maintenance or pro shops. They would be replaced by seasonal workers, who will earn less money and fewer benefits.

Duncan Phillips, a groundskeeper who could lose his job, said the employees plan to lobby against the cuts and warn golfers that the greens won't be as nice.

"Replacing us with just seasonal people . . . the quality of the product will go down," he said.

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**Proposed property-tax or fee increases
and additional revenue generated**

Water rates: \$1,808,000

Business licenses: \$1,323,000

One-time property tax to cover taxes lost last year: \$1,304,780

Property tax to cover legal judgments against the city: \$1,150,000

Property tax for open space and Leonardo: \$1,171,200

Property tax for police: \$940,000

Garbage collection: \$606,000

Fees from public parking lot operators: \$560,000

New fire prevention inspection: \$276,200

Golf course fee hike and new season-pass program: \$174,800

Hazardous material permit hike: \$126,000

Cemetery fee: \$11,700

TOTAL: \$9,451,680

Source: City Council office