

City budget grudgingly accepted

■ **COMMITTEE:** Enterprise zone and urban renewal issues still sticky for members

By Eric Collins
Community Reporter

Although almost half of the members of the Budget Committee said they felt forced into accepting next year's city budget, and despite reservations in three city-funded programs, the Budget Committee voted seven to four in favor of approving the 1998 budget in a Monday evening work session.

"It's not the best decision," City Councilman Scott Meisner said, "but it's not the best of all times."

But the four committee members voting against did not agree.

Ryan Darwish, budget committee president, said he still believed he had not seen an exhausted search through city funds and would vote against the measure as a matter of principle. "I am not thoroughly convinced that this is the budget we need to pass in order to go forward," Darwish said.

Committee member Alan Ze-

lenka, voting against the budget, said he looked forward to future committee meetings in which services slated for cuts will be prioritized for adding them back as money is found.

Of most consternation to the dissenting voters was the enterprise zone, urban renewal and parking structure issues that have risen to the top of some committee members minds throughout the budgeting process.

The enterprise zone program grants tax breaks to businesses who fit certain criteria, while the urban renewal program provides funding to both the downtown district and the University's Riverfront Research Park. The parking structure is being developed with underground parking and both commercial and housing above.

All three programs were characterized by committee member Howard Bonnett as giveaway and subsidies that the city should rethink before cutting the leisure and cultural services that many in the community support.

However, Council President

Laurie Swanson Gribkov reminded the committee that the council has already made the decision to cut future enterprise zone subsidies, will continue to discuss the Urban Renewal Districts in June and will debate the funding for the parking structure on May 28.

Councilman Pat Farr said he believed all three issues would be resolved within the next year or two. "I predict substantial changes in all three," Farr said. "We're going to look at everything and no stone will be left unturned."

The \$269.7 million 1998 budget includes the \$12 million service reduction strategy, based strictly on general fund services, that the committee proposed as a solution to Measure 47 revenue cutbacks. The strategy protects the majority of public safety funding and dramatically cuts recreation and cultural services.

The budget also contains a provision to give about \$600,000 to fund the Rapid Deployment Unit, a division of public safety dealing with on-street drug dealing and related crimes.

Grass or asparagus? Fern debate rages

BOLTON, Vt. — Fourteen-year-old Ashley Stevens fell out of his canoe into the frigid Winooski River, climbed onto the muddy bank and picked fiddleheads for five hours as his wet clothes stiffened and dried in the frosty spring air.

It was worth it. On that early May day, Ashley made \$50 for the 86 pounds of ferns he hauled in to the weigh station.

And he's made about that much every day of the fiddlehead season.

"I know where to go," said Ashley, who grew up along the Winooski.

For four or five weeks a year in Vermont, fiddleheads, young ferns found near water in the Northeast, are big business for anyone who cares to pick them. Before they uncurl to their mature height, the plants resemble violin heads.

The ferns, which taste like asparagus when cooked, are usually sauteed in butter or olive oil and served as a side dish. Restaurants offer them as a seasonal specialty; supermarkets sell them by the pound (\$3.49 at Hannaford Brothers).

"It's Vermont; it's pure Vermont," chef Thomas Guay said. "They're fun, they're stylish, they look great; you know, you don't get them everywhere."

But at a recent dinner where fiddleheads were served to many people, "I don't think I talked to a single person who

stranger

THAN FICTION

really liked them."

Barry Snyder, a chef who owns La Poule a Dents restaurant in Norwich, said he would never serve a fiddlehead.

"I hate fiddleheads; I don't have any preparation that I've ever liked them in," he said. "They taste like grass. If you cook them just a little bit, they still taste like grass. If you put a lot of garlic on them, they taste like garlic and grass. Then you blanch them, they go to mush."

Workers can now be caught red-handed

NEW YORK — Restaurants now have a way to nab employees who don't stop by the sink and lather up before leaving the bathroom.

An infrared detection system that alerts employers when workers leave the restroom without washing up will be tested at the Tropicana Hotel in Atlantic City, N.J., and the William Beaumont Army Medical Center in El Paso, Texas.

The device, on display Monday at a restaurant trade show in Chicago, works like this: Employees wear a badge that triggers an infrared sensor whenever they enter the restroom. A second sensor at the soap dispenser activates if they remain at the sink for at least 15 seconds.

Secondhand smoke doubles disease risk

■ **RESEARCH:** A Harvard Medical School report indicates that secondhand smoke can nearly double the risk of heart disease in women who don't smoke

By Melissa Williams
The Associated Press

DALLAS — Regular exposure to secondhand smoke appears to almost double the risk of heart disease in women who don't smoke, a study of 32,000 nurses found.

That's higher than previous studies have found, and at least one expert said the study represents some of the strongest evidence yet of a link between heart disease and other people's cigarette smoke.

"They're startling in terms of the strength of the association," said Ichiro Kawachi, assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and the study's lead author.

In a major study published last August, nonsmoking spouses of smokers had about a 20 percent higher rate of heart disease deaths than nonsmokers whose spouses did not smoke.

The latest study — published Tuesday in the American Heart Association journal *Circulation* — looked at total exposure to secondhand smoke at home and at work.

Kawachi said he and his colleagues had expected to find a 30 percent to 50 percent higher risk of heart disease among nonsmoking nurses exposed to smoke

at work or home compared with nonsmoking nurses who were not exposed.

Instead, the increased risk was 91 percent for nurses reporting regular exposure and 58 percent for those reporting occasional exposure.

Michael Eriksen, director of the Office on Smoking and Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said the study is one of the strongest to find such a link.

Researchers at Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital studied 32,046 female participants in the Nurses' Health Study ages 36 to 61 who had never smoked and were free of diagnosed heart disease, stroke and cancer in 1982. During 10 years of follow-up, they recorded 152 cases of heart disease, including 127 nonfatal heart attacks.

Kawachi said his study took into account other factors that might explain an association between secondhand smoke and heart attack, including diet, exercise, obesity, high cholesterol and use of the pill.

The researchers did not differentiate between smoke exposure at work and home. Also, they left it up to participants to decide what constitutes "regular" exposure, "occasional" exposure and none at all.

Kawachi said that is one possible weakness of the study, along with the fact that the women were asked about exposure only once, at the beginning of the 10-year study period.

Still, he said, those circumstances would probably result in the women underestimating, not overestimating, the amount of smoke they were exposed to.

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