



Ask the Mayor

by Mayor John Peyton

Fix It Now!

We have so much to be proud of in Jacksonville. Our city has the largest urban park system in the country and one of the nation's greatest natural resources running through the center of our downtown. Our seaport is the American gateway for automobiles, lumber, paper, steel and consumer products, and our city is home to more than 50,000 active military men and women who serve and protect our nation each day.

However, Jacksonville's current budget challenges are jeopardizing the way of life that our residents enjoy and the valuable services that we provide for citizens including

children's programs, senior and community centers, cultural events and even public safety institutions like fire stations and the Sexual Assault Response Center*.

Unless decisive and swift action is taken to solve this budget problem, we will all suffer, especially those who depend on their community for an occasional leg up. That's why I proposed a three-part plan to City Council last month, one that will cut city expenses, address important pension reform and increase revenue so that our city can continue the services that our citizens deserve. This plan will help our community Fix It Now!

Because of forced cuts from Tallahassee, combined with the global economic crisis and an

unsustainable pension system, our city is facing a severe budget crisis. These three factors have taken \$170 million from the coffers of this city: \$100 million in cuts from the state, \$30 million from the global economic crisis (a decline in state shared revenue and revenue from new construction) and \$40 million in increased pension costs.

Although the city is not going out of business, the needs of this city are greater than its available revenue. If my plan, including a millage increase, is not passed by City Council, this city will be forced to cut an additional \$50 million in expenses. Cuts at that drastic level could mean closing fire stations and libraries, eliminating recycling and cutting off funding for children

and other social and cultural services.

Ask yourself, "What kind of city do I want to live in?"

My proposed millage increase will cost the average homeowner \$97 next year and will bring property taxes back to about what they were before Tallahassee interfered with home rule. Is this minimal increase too much to ask to ensure that our most vulnerable citizens receive the helping hand that they need? Is it too much to ask so that we can make sure our community provides the kinds of cultural, social and public safety programs that make a city great? I don't think so, and I don't think you do either.

Turn conversation into action. Show your support for

my Fix It Now! plan by calling and e-mailing all 19 Councilmembers, writing a letter to the editor or by joining city blog discussions about the budget.

If you take these steps, our community will not endure the consequences of a "business as usual" budget. And, Jacksonville will continue to be the kind of top notch city that provides a high quality of life and important services for its citizens. Help us Fix It Now!

**Editor's note: Last year this agency served 337 sexual assault victims. The services they offer include forensic medical exams, follow-up medical care, HIV testing, support groups, crisis intervention, emergency financial assistance, criminal justice advocacy.*



Registration



Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club



Part of the crowd



Harmony Dental Lab Volunteers



Old Plank Road Baptist Church Volunteers



Good food at the end of the ride.



Latin American Motorcycle Association



Clyde "Pa" Mills still grieves over murdered son Marty after 9 years.

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