



City of Omaha  
Mike Fahey, Mayor

**2006 Budget Presentation  
Statement by Mayor Mike Fahey  
July 19, 2005**

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, Mr. President and members of the City Council. It's a pleasure to be here with you and I thank you for your time today.

I am pleased to present the 2006 Budget for the City of Omaha. As you review this document you will find no property tax increase, funding for all necessary city services and a new emphasis on how we market our city to the nation.

This budget benefits from our previous years of work renegotiating the police and fire contracts, freezing wages and jobs, and reducing some programs. Our employees sacrificed in 2004 to help us avoid a property tax increase and next year we are paying them back, without a property tax increase. In short, our plan is working.

Over the past five years our general fund growth has averaged a moderate 2.5%, about the rate of inflation and a testament to city government's interest in protecting taxpayer dollars. And it underscores what I have said from the start: The key to success is to control spending.

Our economy continues to brighten slowly. And while strict fiscal management remains necessary, this budget is a stark contrast to previous budgets marked by program, service and job reductions.

Omaha's neighborhoods remain an emphasis. And I am proud the city has new, energetic partners like Omaha by Design who are working with us to promote neighborhoods. To continue our work in the neighborhoods, we will restore the forester position to the Parks Department as well as an additional \$90,000 for tree removal. Funds for mowing in our right of ways will also increase. We continue our support of Destination Midtown's redevelopment efforts with traffic and infrastructure studies and look forward to crafting new economic plans in Benson with neighborhood and business leaders.

Six housing inspectors, the largest number the city has ever had on staff, will remain. Funding for my Neighborhood Grant Program will continue to positively impact neighborhoods citywide. We need only to view the projects in Dundee, Florence or Maple Village to understand the desire the plan has fueled and the vision it's sparked. Community leaders are now planning, along with city leaders, for the future of their individual communities. Proud homeowners and stronger neighborhoods are worthwhile investments for city government.

For our libraries we're adding five new positions including a bilingual specialist to serve our community's growing Latino population. We will continue to assess library staffing levels as we believe a streamlined force may lead to extended library hours. And I send a special note of thanks to the Library Foundation and the Friends of the Library for their commitment to our library system. Partnerships make us all stronger and their work is especially helpful in maintaining current materials.

We will add approximately 15 additional civilian positions, a 1% increase. In addition to the Library and Parks Departments we will add staff to Law, Personnel, Public Works and the Greater Omaha Convention and Visitor's Bureau. Even with these additions the city has 15% fewer employees than five years ago.

Omaha is a vibrant, modern metro area. It's a great place to grow a business, raise a family, host a convention or take a vacation. And while individual convention planners, tourists and businesses are taking notice, the nation is just beginning to recognize the advantages of choosing Omaha. It's up to all of us to carry this message, and this year we've added new marketing dollars for the Greater Omaha Convention and Visitor's Bureau.

In total we have \$750,000 added to the GOCVB which includes a grant match from the Peter Kiewit Foundation. Monies are slated for advertising and a new Spirit Fund which the city will utilize in collaboration with community partners to promote our city.

We will continue to take advantage of our first class assets - like the Qwest Center Omaha, the Hilton Omaha, and the Holland Performing Arts Center. Promoting our city for living, working and playing is a team effort and I know our unique ability to work together will serve us well in this effort.

To keep Omaha growing we will complete the implementation of a \$1 million computer system to streamline the work process in the Planning Department's Permits and Inspections Division. And an additional City Planner II will facilitate review of Sanitary Improvement District applications.

The 2006 Budget presents two fee increases which have not been raised for some time. The Street Cut Fee has not been increased in eight years and will be raised to reflect the actual cost of repair. The Telephone Occupation Tax has not been increased in 11 years and will cost a residential user with a \$50 monthly phone bill an additional \$3 a year.

As it has throughout our time here, public safety remains a top priority. Two police recruit classes are planned and our Community Policing Policy continues to reduce crime and strengthen our community. We will continue to shift and balance our gang suppression activities to meet our needs. By the end of this year we will have added 53 officers since 2001.

For Omaha Fire we will add eight new firefighters and eagerly await the opening of the fire tower later this year. We will also put Rescue 2, a second heavy rescue truck, and six new rescue squads into service this summer.

I want to note the tremendous leadership of Chiefs Thomas Warren and Robert Dahlquist. They and their teams provide excellent, dependable, professional services 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

And to our firefighters and police officers, again I tip my hat to you for the wage freezes and contract renegotiations which helped city government manage through tough financial times without property tax increases. The City is proud of you and happy to repay you for your sacrifices.

I am adding a critical public safety team member to the budget this year. That is the office of the Independent Public Safety Auditor. The office has proven itself over the past few years and belongs in the General Fund. Four years ago, the Lozier Foundation graciously stepped forward to help privately fund this service, but it is time the city take over. Our community, our Police and Fire Departments and our city are better for the outside-looking-in review of our policies and procedures. It's a neutral, third party that citizens can trust. This kind of trust is invaluable in building important communication bridges to all parts of our city.

Today I also present to you the 2006-2011 Capital Improvement Plan which reflects my commitment to promote our city's growth within fiscal constraints while fighting property tax increases and prioritizing neighborhoods.

The long-term financial challenges for the city, primarily due to the original and unconventional financing plan for the Qwest Center Omaha and other riverfront construction remain. We continue to reduce capital spending to address this.

But we also continue our work renovating 70 neighborhood parks and five libraries with our Neighborhood Parks & Libraries Renovation Plan. Nearly half of the parks have been completed or are currently under renovation. Our Youth Sports Initiative continues to improve soccer, baseball, and softball facilities citywide and as previously mentioned our support for Destination Midtown fuels several studies. The Omaha Police and Fire Training Center will begin construction this year and work continues at Standing Bear Lake and Zorinsky Park and on our North and South 24th Street Corridors.

The popular brick streets that add so much character to our Old Market will be extended on 11th Street from Farnam to Harney as part of our work with Omaha by Design to revitalize the Gene Leahy Mall.

Additionally, I proposed a unique plan yesterday to the Omaha Public Schools Plants Committee to collaborate in the construction of a joint library, community center and elementary school to serve our growing population in Northwest Omaha. Saddlebrook is a first-of-its kind project offering both city and school district taxpayers tremendous efficiencies and benefits.

I believe this project's success will become a model for future partnerships boasting streamlined services and cost savings. Time and time again, Omaha sets new standards for working together to benefit the community - and this is yet another example.

No doubt challenges lie ahead. Our economy, while growing, remains unpredictable and sluggish. But as we have in the past, we will manage our way through while protecting what's most important: Our neighborhoods; our public safety; our city's growth; and our finances.

We have managed city government like a business, faced the challenges, and avoided property tax increases all while providing excellent city services. For this we owe a hardy thanks to my cabinet, each of whom does an excellent job leading their departments, to the employees of the City of Omaha, and to the people of our city. We have all worked together over the past four years for the common good and it has paid off.

And our momentum continues to build. I am proud to serve as your mayor and genuinely enjoy the opportunity to help guide this city into the future. I thank you each again for your time today as well as your commitment to our city and look forward to working with you.

Thank you.

Mike Fahey, Mayor  
City of Omaha