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Groups praise Omaha mayor's proposed city budget, offer some suggestions for the future

By Roseann Moring / World-Herald staff writer
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Groups as diverse as Nebraska Taxpayers for Freedom, Omaha Together One Community and the Empowerment Network came to City Hall on Tuesday to praise Mayor Jean Stothert's proposed 2018 budget.

The council is scheduled to vote on the \$903 million budget proposal at its Aug. 22 meeting at City Hall, 1819 Farnam St.

Still the groups offered suggestions for city spending in the future.

One person made a request for a specific change: Greg Youell of the Metropolitan Area Planning Agency asked the council to increase the funding for Heartland 2050 to \$40,000 from Stothert's proposed \$10,000.

That would put Omaha more in line with other nearby cities and send the message to donors that the city is behind the long-term planning project.

Several others offered big-picture suggestions for future budgets.

Doug Kagan, of the taxpayer group, wore a sticker that said "Jean's Team."

"This budget clearly indicates a financially healthy city," he said.

He said that in the future he'd like the city to spend less on what he described as "non-basic" services and sell assets that aren't profitable.

That way, he said, the city could direct the extra money toward tax reductions.

Several members of OTOC told the council that they're happy with Stothert's proposal to keep demolition funding at \$1.1 million.

They said that as the city reduces its backlog of condemned homes, it should turn its focus to rehabilitating houses with several code violations.

"Even when our forward-thinking city initiatives are in place, the process as it is now is moving too slowly," said Charles Gould of OTOC.

Willie Barney of the Empowerment Network thanked the city for its \$1 million allocation for the Step-Up jobs program.

He said the city has more work to do, however, on violence prevention and reducing unemployment.

"We want to thank you for what you've done up to this point but we definitely don't want to take our foot off the accelerator," he said.

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