



Get Houston Chronicle home delivery for only \$3 a week. Save 61%!

White's inside scoop

The mayor is right: There's no extra money at City Hall

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Sept. 27, 2009, 10:12PM

The covey of Houston mayoral candidates got some free advice the other day from someone in the know. Mayor Bill White warned them about making promises involving new spending: Don't.

The money's just not there, says White, the term-limited, six-year incumbent who will presumably be on to bigger things politically.

The mayor's cautionary words also make good clip-and-save reminders for city voters as they meet the mayoral candidates during the fall campaign. And they'll come in handy in voter encounters with those vying for City Council seats and the position of city controller.

Question One for all of these hopefuls appears to be: How are you going to pay for it?

As Chronicle reporter Bradley Olson noted in his story on White's advice ("White's tip: too soon to be spending," Page A1, Sunday, Sept. 20), all four of the mayoral candidates have promised backing for projects that may or may not involve more spending.

For example, they unanimously back infrastructure around a new soccer stadium. This is gift-wrapped in assurances that it will be paid for with proceeds from a TIRZ, a tax increment reinvestment zone. Then there's the talk of a new Hispanic museum, an Office of Economic Development and finding the dollars for police



advertisement

overtime. But where will the dollars come from?

The reasons for financial straits ahead for the city of Houston will be instantly recognizable to any long-term resident. One that has an especially familiar, and maybe ominous, ring is liability for city employee pensions.

Then there's the nagging revenue question. The city relies on property taxes and a sales tax for roughly 60 percent of its revenue.

Coming out of a deep recession, the take from each of those tax sources is in doubt.

The question of property appraisals seems especially problematic for budget planners. Residential valuations that had long been increased by 10 percent annually, the maximum allowed under state law, in many areas of the city are likely to be more flat and less predictable for awhile.

It figures to be an interesting fall campaign season. We're grateful to every candidate standing for office. And we eagerly await their answers.

Advertisement

total gym ON TV
Only have 20 minutes a day to get into shape?

Try Total Gym! FREE SHIPPING
30 Day Trial Only \$49⁹⁵

Call now for this special offer:
1.866.734.7282

VISA MASTERCARD DISCOVER AMERICAN EXPRESS

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™