

# Mayor Budgets Added Money for HA, After-School Expansion and ACS

By RICHARD STEIER | Posted: Monday, May 12, 2014 5:00 pm

Mayor de Blasio May 8 proposed discontinuing charging the Housing Authority for police services, giving it an extra \$70 million to fund expedited apartment repairs and improved building security, and spending \$145 million on expanded after-school programs as part of a \$73.9-billion budget that he said “in every way makes our children a priority.”

## 'Reality Not Theory'

Clearly reveling in the settlement of a United Federation of Teachers contract a week earlier that he hopes serves as a long-term pattern for the rest of the municipal workforce, the Mayor said, “We’re able now to project a real budget—not a theory but something we believe will hold over the years ahead.”

The UFT deal, which still needs ratification by union members in early June after being overwhelmingly approved by delegates the day before his budget presentation, is crucial to Mr. de Blasio’s plans on two fronts. Because it runs through October 2018 and offers a delayed payment schedule for retroactive raises that some had feared would consume much of the reserve in the budget, it offers the potential for stable labor relations at a reasonable price for the city. And a key component of that deal—which has been signed off on by the rest of the municipal unions—provides for health-benefit savings that he noted will continue to grow well after the city has paid out the retroactive raises that are due the UFT and unions representing school supervisors and custodians and two different groups of nurses.

Communications Workers of America Local 1180 President Arthur Cheliotis said that the health-care accord symbolized the change in tone since Mr. de Blasio succeeded Michael Bloomberg, who during the last of his three terms was constantly at odds with union leaders, to the point where they sued him for issuing a request for proposals on a new health-care provider without consulting them.

## 'He Worked With Us'

The agreement on health savings, which the Mayor expects to yield \$3.4 billion over the next four years, was achieved “by working with unions to find solutions and evaluating models that have effectively improved health-care services while reducing costs, not by shifting costs to city workers,” Mr. Cheliotis said in a statement. He was alluding to the fact that the deal does not require employees to pay a share of their premiums.

Several of the key elements of his spending plan were already in place, the most-notable of them being the major expansion of pre-kindergarten services so that a partial-day offering for 20,000 children will grow to cover 53,000 in a full-day format by September. It is being funded by the state budget—a compromise on the Mayor’s intention of raising taxes on the wealthiest city residents to generate \$530 million to cover both pre-K and after-school programs. State officials approved the spending of \$300 million this year on pre-K, compared to the \$340 million Mr. de Blasio planned to devote to the initiative from the tax increase. The state delayed until next year its funding of after-school services, leading the Mayor to propose providing directly from the city budget \$145 million of the \$190 million he had hoped for.

### **Council Wants More Cops**

The City Council, which will begin budget hearings May 15 as a prelude to its negotiations with the Mayor on a final spending plan that must be adopted before the end of June, issued a statement praising his decision to end the practice of forcing the HA to pay for police services. It indicated it was also on board with his plan to rehabilitate two police stationhouses used by cops from the 13th Precinct in Manhattan and Brooklyn Narcotics North and construct a new stationhouse for officers of the 40th Precinct in The Bronx.

But Council Members took issue with Mr. de Blasio’s decision not to provide funding to hire 1,000 additional cops, as they had urged, and made no mention of his after-school expansion in a seven-page press release.

The Mayor had cited the pre-K and after-school initiatives as key components of his effort to transform the education system, which will also include finding more building space to relieve overcrowding and ensure that students are no longer taught in outdoor trailers.

### **Multi-Purpose Program**

“Our law-enforcement professionals,” he declared, “would be the first to say that quality after-school programs are intensely important to police” as a crime-prevention tool, in addition to their value in offering both educational help and recreational activities. He anticipated that nearly 100,000 students would take advantage of the programs. His plan would also look to offer summer programs to 33,000 students—more than double the number who participated a year ago.

Mr. de Blasio’s budget booklet noted that 1,200 certified Teachers have applied to the Department of Education for pre-K positions—53 percent more than at this time a year ago—and that another 1,100 applications were submitted by individuals with elementary certification seeking to teach pre-K in schools operated by community-based organizations. A City University of New York certification program will provide up to 400 certified pre-K instructors by September.

The Mayor told reporters in the City Hall Blue Room regarding the Council push for more cops, “I know that’s a heartfelt request on their part.” He contended, though, that the NYPD and its officers, although there are 6,000 fewer of them than when Mayor Bloomberg took office more than a dozen years ago, “continue to succeed” in reducing crime. He said their efforts in that area and in reducing traffic fatalities after he made that a priority following a spate of them during his first month in office left him convinced that the current staffing level of about 34,600 was sufficient.

### **Major ACS Hirings**

He also plans to hire hundreds of new workers to help the Administration for Children’s Services implement a Child Protective Reform Plan to provide greater oversight of high-risk cases and of children under court-ordered supervision.

Professional Staff Congress President Barbara Bowen was pleased by the Mayor’s plan to spend \$20 million on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math programs at community colleges within the City University of New York, calling it “a powerful first step in ending the era of public disinvestment in CUNY.”

At the start of his presentation, Mr. de Blasio quoted Mayor Fiorello La Guardia: “Do after the election as you said you would do before the election.” Terming the spending plan “responsible, progressive and honest,” he said, “There are some who have trouble equating fiscal responsibility with progressive values [but] you need a strong and stable foundation” to be able to do more in terms of the fiscal fairness he has championed going back to last year’s mayoral campaign.

In addition to freeing money for the HA to hire additional personnel to provide repair work and improve security by ending a two-decade-old practice in which the agency had to reimburse the city for police protection, the Mayor said he intended to shore up housing services in the private sector by adding inspectors and code-enforcement personnel at the Department of Housing Preservation and Development to ensure that tenants were being treated fairly.

### **Limiting Labor Costs**

Questioned by reporters about the overall cost of labor contracts if the UFT deal forms the basis for agreements with the rest of the municipal unions, Mr. de Blasio deferred to his Labor Commissioner, Robert W. Linn. The total cost of a citywide agreement consistent with the UFT terms, he said, would be \$13.4 billion for wages and fringe benefits over the next four years, but this would be offset considerably by several factors that limit its toll on the prospective budget. In addition to \$3.5 billion covered by the labor reserve, he said, the health-benefit-savings agreement that the Municipal Labor Committee approved May 5 after it was essentially negotiated by the

UFT would provide \$3.4 billion over the next four years, and \$1 billion has been removed from a joint Health Stabilization Fund to help defray the city's costs. This means, Mr. Linn said, that the added cost of those deals to the city would be just \$5.5 billion.

And, both officials noted, the health-care savings will continue to grow after all the raises covered under the contracts have been paid.

Before he became Mayor, Mr. de Blasio said, he had wondered at his predecessor's willingness to leave office with "a labor contract hanging out there, creating uncertainty. That always rubbed me the wrong way."

### **Bloomberg's Shutdown**

Mr. Bloomberg had insisted the city lacked the money to continue its practice of giving retroactive raises, which would have left the entire workforce going three years or more under an after-the-fact pay freeze. He had also balked at continuing a pattern he started with 200,000 of the city's workers, leaving another 150,000—110,000 of them members of the UFT—deprived of the two 4-percent raises he had given to those who settled contracts before the 2008 national financial crisis began eroding the city's fiscal resources.

"It really should have been resolved in the past administration, by any normal measure," Mr. de Blasio said. But the UFT deal, he noted, thanks to an "extraordinary effort" by Mr. Linn and other city officials, had offered a path toward lasting labor stability, calling it "a very, very promising start" toward a pattern for the entire workforce.