

Budget Deal: Jail System, HA Benefit, 200 Police Civilians to Move Cops

By DAN ROSENBLUM | Posted: Monday, June 23, 2014 5:30 pm

The de Blasio administration announced a \$75-billion budget deal with the City Council late June 19 that will hire 200 civilian workers to move desk-bound Police Officers onto patrol, expand mental-health and violence-reduction programs at Rikers Island and save 57 endangered Housing Authority community centers.

A \$5-Billion Spending Increase

In announcing the “handshake deal” for the fiscal year that starts July 1, Mr. de Blasio noted it was one of the earliest agreements in recent history. It would be \$5 billion more than the budget adopted for the current year, which ends June 30.

The budget does not contain any significant cuts to city services, according to Mr. de Blasio. He said that as a former Council Member, he recalled “many years where the process was filled with conflict, where it was filled with a lot of misdirection, where the so-called budget dance ran wild, where people struggled to get the most basic things for their communities. We said we weren’t going to do any of that.”

Still, there were some notable changes from the adopted spending plan and the \$73.9-billion executive budget proposed in May. It includes \$6.2 million to hire 200 Police Administrative Aides, which would allow the NYPD to send the same number of Police Officers back to the street without hiring more police, as the Council had urged. Council members had pushed to hire 1,000 more officers but Mr. de Blasio claimed the patrol force was adequate.

“This is an incredible victory and turning around an administration, in terms of NYPD, of really getting civilianization really taken care of and starting on a path to make those changes,” said Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito. The Bloomberg administration had resisted civilianizing even after an arbitrator’s ruling that was upheld in court requiring it to do so.



AN EARLY HANDSHAKE

AN EARLY HANDSHAKE: City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and Mayor de Blasio were applauded by Council Members June 19 after announcing a \$75-billion budget deal. The bargain would include \$32.5 million on programs to reduce violence at Rikers Island, \$17 million to keep open 57 community centers and \$6.2 million to hire 200 Police Administrative Aides.

Union: 'A Beginning'

Eddie Rodriguez, president of Local 1549 of District Council 37—which represents most NYPD civilian workers—told this newspaper he was happy about the support from City Hall, but said that “it’s a beginning.”

The local rallied to have more than 700 officers reassigned from desk duty, saying the city could save almost \$70,000 per person by hiring civilians to work in offices before adding more police.

“Well, there are more able-bodied Police Officers still doing clerical work and they need to go before they start hiring,” Mr. Rodriguez said.

Lillian Roberts, the executive director of DC 37, said in a statement that the budget “signals a clear departure from the previous administration’s policies of neglect to essential public services.”

Still, the lack of new police hiring had its critics in two Republican Council Members, Vincent Ignizio and Steven Matteo, who told reporters in a joint statement they were “troubled” by the administration’s “unwillingness to compromise.”

'Need Infusion of Officers'

“The alarming rise in shootings and the spike in crime in public housing and in our borough are evidence that an infusion of new officers is sorely needed,” the Staten Island Councilmen said.

The deal also allocates \$32.5 million to the Correction Department to reduce violence and add clinical support and separate facilities for inmates with mental illness. Several controversial incidents have highlighted the problems in sending the mentally ill to the city jails, from assaults on Correction officers and civilian workers to the handling of an inmate who one official described as having been “baked to death” in an overheated cell.

Correction Commissioner Joseph Ponte recently said up to 40 percent of city inmates had a diagnosed mental illness, though those statistics were questioned by Correction Officers Benevolent Association President Norman Seabrook, who claimed that many inmates took advantage of incentives to claim mental-health issues.

The new budget would spend \$19 million for crime-reduction for the HA to increase neighborhood watch, domestic-violence outreach and services to help residents with employment and benefits. The budget will also include \$17 million to prevent the closing of 57 community and senior centers. Social Service Employees Union Local 371 protested the cuts that would have affected 160 employees.

Other Additions

The budget also allocates \$17.5 million for summer youth programs and jobs, \$10 million for more child-care vouchers for low-income families and \$6.3 million for free school lunch to middle-school students in September.

During budget hearings, DOE officials said providing free lunch could endanger Federal money, but Mr. de Blasio told reporters he was now confident he could retain funding levels.

The three library systems had asked for \$65 million for a “new deal” for libraries. Mr. de Blasio said there were some partial restorations, but not at the amount requested.

“There are some additions to libraries, but not six-day service across the board,” he said.

The financial plan also reflects \$1 billion in extra revenue taken from the Health Stabilization Fund as a result of the Teachers’ contract. Citywide spending on labor contracts is estimated to cost \$13.4 billion over the next four years, but is projected to be partly offset by \$3.5 billion from the labor reserve, \$3.4 billion in health-care savings negotiated by the Municipal Labor Committee and the infusion from the stabilization fund.

This year’s budget will also build upon changes announced in May that include adding a universal pre-kindergarten expansion and \$145 million for after-school programs.

The Council is expected to adopt the final budget this week.