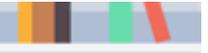
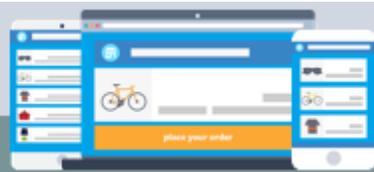


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NEWS LOCAL

Shoemaker not daunted by failed motion

By Elaine Della-Mattia, Sault Star

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Matthew Shoemaker's bid to launch the 2018 budget process by directing staff to target a one-per-cent budget cut may have failed Monday night, but he said that's not going to slow him down.

The rookie Ward 3 city councillor failed in his bid to ask city council to support a motion directing city staff in all departments to target their 2018 preliminary budget with a decrease of at least one per cent from their 2017 approved budgets.

Shoemaker said with the city's economic anxiety, due to the instability in the local economy, it's incumbent on council to begin the budgeting process for next year immediately.

Shoemaker said that a one-per-cent reduction is equivalent to about \$1 million in savings across the divisions.

He wanted the exercise to be done by the departments themselves to determine what, if any, reductions in services would need to accompany that type of budget cut.

Ward 2 Coun. Susan Myers opposed the motion, arguing the exercise is premature and no one should presuppose what, if any decreases will happen a year from now.

Ward 1 Paul Christian said he believed the intent of the motion was a good one, but also argued against its timing.

"It's a little premature to be asking for specific cuts next year," he said.

His wardmate, Steve Butland also called it inappropriate at this time and said while it may be a popular decision with taxpayers, it is not a good decision.

Shoemaker said the motion was designed to get a feel for what a one-per-cent cut would mean to each of the departments and who better conduct the review than those who work the front lines.

"I'm not sure what ground council will have to stand on now at budget time," he told The Sault Star. "It's not hard to do the exercise and show us what the (departmental) budgets would look like. We were not necessarily going to approve them."

City council, over its first two years of its term made sweeping changes to the budget process in moves designed to give council more say where or how taxpayer money is spent.

"I think this is an abdication of council's obligation to explore all avenues," Shoemaker said. "We set the target for staff and that is governance at its best."

Some councillors at the debate Monday suggested that Shoemaker use the finance committee to examine such proposals.

Shoemaker, a member of the finance committee said that idea was turned down last year.

"It's a bit cheeky for council to direct it to the finance committee when they didn't want to do that last year," he argued.

However, the failure of the resolution – it failed in a 10-3 recorded vote – is not going to stop Shoemaker from trying to bring costs down for Sault Ste. Marie taxpayers.

"I will be looking at other ideas, perhaps through a motion to look at the terms of reference for the finance committee and go from there," Shoemaker said.

In December, city council passed its budget that will see an increase of 4.34% to the tax levy.

Certain 'uncontrollable' factors were attributed to a large portion of that increase, including the use of surplus and reserves to reduce the levy in the 2016 budget, higher-than-anticipated costs for WSIB and PTSB, as well as adding in salary increases negotiated under collective agreements.

Shoemaker said he also believes it's incumbent on council to keep increases low, including those from the boards and agencies the city funds.

"We appoint the majority of those boards and we need to ask the candidates for those boards whether they'd look at those budgets," he said.

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