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City of Toronto 2002 budget information**March 4, 2002- Mayor Mel Lastman's remarks to Council**

Members of Council, I would like to begin by congratulating Budget Chief David Shiner, members of the Budget Advisory and Policy And Finance committees, the Standing Committee chairs, and all members of Council and staff that helped put this budget together.

A special thanks to our CAO, Shirley Hoy, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer, Joe Pennachetti, all our commissioners, Bob Mavin, the budget managers and staff, and clerks Betty Henderson, Margaret Sexton, Colleen O'Neil and Merle Macdonald.

For the second year in a row, we have a budget before us that was created without deal-making.

We have a budget that protects those City services that our residents expect.

Just as important, we have a budget that spares our property tax payers from an unreasonable tax increase.

4.6 per cent protects the police budget to ensure our residents' safety.

It protects snow removal services to keep our streets and sidewalks clear.

It protects shelter beds and the jobs of those counsellors in hostels who help our less fortunate.

It allows us to keep pools open in partnership with our public school board.

It does all of these things and more.

This budget calls for the hiring of 55 new firefighters who are essential for us to maintain the level of safety our public expects.

It includes provisions for a youth gang initiative. It has earmarked funds for new staff and equipment for our emergency medical services.

It has addressed some key parts of our emergency plan so that we will be better prepared should the unthinkable ever happen in Toronto.

It hasn't been easy to reach 4.6 per cent.

Eighty per cent of our budget is dictated to us by the provincial government - and Queen's Park have once again refused to give us access to our entire tax base.

If the province treated us the same way it treats Mississauga or Oakville or the rest of the municipalities in the GTA, our 2002 tax

increase would be 1.63 per cent.

That's lower than Mississauga. Lower than Richmond Hill. Lower than Vaughan or Burlington or Oakville.

Instead, the province has insisted that Toronto's residential property owners bear the brunt of this tax increase alone.

It's not fair. But this is the hand we were dealt - and 4.6 per cent is the best we can do under the circumstances.

We are working hard to improve those circumstances for next year.

As you know, our efforts to improve funding levels from the provincial and the federal governments are on-going.

We have had some success with the province. Queen's Park has committed an average of \$100 million a year for the next ten years to public transit in our city.

Virtually all of the Tory leadership hopefuls have identified Toronto as a priority to them - because they recognize that Toronto hasn't been treated fairly for the last four years.

We have potential premiers talking about giving us a share of the gas tax.

It is my hope that we will have similar success with the federal government in the year ahead - and that we will convince Ottawa that Toronto and the rest of Canada's major cities need a new deal.

Until that happens, we have to do our best to keep property tax increases to a minimum - which is why the Policy and Finance Committee approved my motion to cap this year's increase at 4.6 per cent.

The budget committee has worked very hard to get us this far and I hope we don't see any last-minute additions that will increase the burden on our residential property owner.

If a councillor wants to add something to this budget, that councillor should also be ready to tell us what they think we should take out of this budget in order to pay for it.

We have worked together in previous years to spare our residents an unreasonable tax increase and protect those services we all hold near and dear to our hearts.

Let's keep that tradition alive. Let's deliver our best effort to the people of Toronto - and pass a budget that they can afford.