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INSIDE YOUR SUN

Pay increases are being pondered for mayor, City Council

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LAKEWOOD — As Ohio braces for a \$7 to \$8 billion budget shortfall in the upcoming fiscal year, several local governments will be preparing to cut spending and tighten budgets in any way possible, except maybe one.

During last week's City Council meeting, Ward 1 Councilman Kevin Butler, backed by Mayor Ed Fitzgerald, proposed to raise the mayor's salary from \$75,000 to \$100,000 and increase the City Council's salaries to \$11,000 per year plus \$3,300 apiece in health benefits.

Since the charter prevents council members from raising their own pay, these increases wouldn't take effect until the beginning of the next term of each office in 2012 and 2014, Butler said. He also noted that his motivations stem, in large part, from the fact that the mayor has not received a raise since 1991 and because the council members have not gotten one since 1978.

Fitzgerald, who will step down as mayor next week to be sworn in as a Cuyahoga County Executive, offered a few final remarks on the proposed ordinance.

"If I remember correctly, I

am the 43rd highest paid city employee," Fitzgerald said. "Not that I should be number one, but a CEO of a company with over 500 employees and a multimillion dollar budget should be receiving more than \$75,000."

Fitzgerald said that similar ordinances have been brought before the council several times over the decades, and he admitted that he "chickened out" and voted against a pay raise when it came before him during his time as a councilman.

ASCME union representative, Eugene Byrne, stood up in opposition to the measure

and cited that unionized employees did not receive raises in 2010. He called the pay raises unconscionable and said that it was bad timing given the weakened state of the economy.

To help justify his position, Butler argued that "offering at least marginally competitive compensation will draw a wider pool of talented people seeking office."

"Even though public service is still a sacrifice, Lakewood residents offering to slog through a campaign, often at great personal expense, should feel confident that they'll be reasonably compensated for that service. Both

positions — council and mayor — require a tremendous amount of time and creativity. Offering 1980s-era salaries can only hurt the city's chances of attracting the best candidates."

The discussion on this proposed ordinance will resume

next month and, so far, each council member is staying relatively neutral as the discussions and legislative processes have yet to play out.

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