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Joint Finance Committee Improved the Budget, But More Needs to be Done to Maintain Oshkosh Services

(Oshkosh, WI.) In March at the annual State of the City Address City Manager Mark Rohloff outlined that the proposed savings from the tools provided by Act 10 only covered 61% of the cuts to municipal funding programs in Governor Walker's proposed state budget.

In April City Manager Rohloff supported the Urban Alliance and their urging of the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) to close the gap between Act 10's cost cutting tools and the funding cuts in the state budget by: 1) reversing the raid on the recycling grant program; 2) fully funding or at least reducing the cuts to general transportation aids for municipalities; and 3) requiring police and fire employees to participate in the same shared sacrifices that Act 10 imposes on general municipal employees.

Over the past few weeks the Joint Finance Committee made several changes to the budget bill to the benefit of the city of Oshkosh, including:

- Reducing the cuts in shared revenue
- Reducing the cuts in general transportation aids
- Restoring the recycling grant program to 60% of current funding
- Requiring newly hired police and fire employees to contribute to their pension
- Making it unnecessary to bargain with police and fire unions on the choice and design of health insurance plans
- Repealing minimum spending requirements on police and fire budgets
- Increasing the Wisconsin Retirement System eligibility threshold from 600 to 1,200 hours in a year

These changes reduce the impact of the cuts to municipal funded programs and restore some management rights. The city of Oshkosh projected 2012 shortfall went from \$1,061,721 to \$702,000, due to the changes. This shortfall does not include any increases in operating costs such as fuel, materials, and utilities.

Even with the proposed changes City Manager Rohloff still has major concerns about the current status of the state budget. Most notably that the JFC did not apply Act 10 to all municipal employees. Instead, the JFC chose to expand the police and fire exemption from the pension and health care contribution requirements in Act 10 to include police and fire chiefs and their supervisory staff. This move will cost the city of Oshkosh \$143,000. There is also another proposal to exempt transit employees from Act 10 provisions. This move would

cost the city an additional \$100,000. “Regardless of the changes made, any changes involving employees should apply to all employees,” Rohloff said. “It is a simple fairness issue. There are too many inconsistencies with the way this is written.”

City Manager Rohloff believes that the legislature should consider additional changes to the state budget in order for the city of Oshkosh to effectively maintain services for the citizens.

For more information on the impact of the proposed state budget on the city, please contact Finance Director Peggy Steeno at (920) 236-5005.

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