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Subject: Please vote no

Dear Finance Committee:

First, a special thanks to Brian Richardson and Steve Purtee for answering my questions on the budget. They are both always very responsive and respectful.

Please vote no on the 2024 budget. This is the second version we have been given. There has to be a better version for the citizens of Jonesboro. I am blind copying the council to avoid starting any reply alls to start an unauthorized public meeting. I am copying the press to comply with FOIA. I am not asking for any response. I simply would like to provide my thoughts on why I can't support this budget in its current form if it goes to full council. I do not serve on this committee so this is the most efficient way for me to share my thoughts. If the city clerk would also enter this in the record.

From the overview of staff positions we were given in the second binder, it seems the only three positions regrades across all of city government come into two administrative departments.

Specifically, it seems we are regrading 66% of an entire department (communications). It seems both of the staff of the Communications Director do a great job. However, it seems this budget seems to overly favor the communications department. Among the proposed additional positions it is proposed to add a position to the communications department. With COJ having around 20 departments I just can't imagine how we are disproportionately investing into one department. Conway has one communications staff position inside the Mayor's office from their website. It appears the same is true for Rogers. A lot of communications especially social media can be super streamlined with artificial intelligence. Our Conway business pays a third party \$500 a month to do multiple posts a week. The growth in the communications department

seems to be more focused on promoting the Mayor not the city. The taxpayers do not need to invest further in the Communications Department. I hear frequently from citizens how unhappy they are with the communications director's public behavior toward people like Patti Lack, Josh Brown, etc. The communications department does not need additional staff. It needs a new director.

I voted against the Mayor's office expanding from three staff to five staff in December of 2020. I see a pattern of bureaucratic growth year after year by this administration. We are fortunate that our city council is comprised of many successful and smart men and women. I just don't believe any of us would run our households or businesses the way I see the city being run. I feel even more responsible in many ways as a caretaker of the taxpayer's dollars for us to do even better than we might do in our private lives.

Last year we added a social media position to the parks department. This year it is proposed to add a social media position to JETS. No doubt our various departments might have social media needs. However, it seems those would be best processed inside the communications office or a third party. Each department having a communications staffer report to a department head who isn't a communications expert is not for the best. At the last Public Services meeting I asked the JET Director about the proposed additional full-time marketing position he said they might make a few social media posts a year or sell ads. JET does not need this full-time position.

Also, the shooting range expenses are out of control. The city generally won't make money from things. However, we always have to weigh the cost/benefit. It appears Craighead Forest costs around \$414,546 dollars more annually than it brings in. That seems like we are doing a great job there given how many people use it. The shooting range costs \$687,108 dollars more than it brings in. How many more people used CFP annually than the shooting range? 10x? The shooting range of course serves a purpose for JPD, too. This spending would never happen in private business.

As a council, no doubt the finances of the city are one of our main jobs. Most boards review their CEO annually including both their pay and employment. The council can only determine the pay of our CEO. The voters determine the CEO/Mayor's employment. The Mayor's firing of Rachel Anderson will potentially cost the city a lot of money. As we have seen from media coverage and hundreds of social media posts the public is very unhappy with his actions. This budget can not include a cost of living raise for the Mayor when he fired one of our best employees a week before Thanksgiving for exercising their First Amendment rights. This is a matter of principle and sending a clear message to our employees that we have their back. This piece is not about the money.

As the old saying goes "show me your checkbook, and I'll show you your priorities." This budget does not reflect what I hear people want to see our priorities be. Rex Nelson the Editor of the Arkansas Democrat Gazette recently said cities of the future have to be safe, fun, and clean. This budget in my opinion does not get us there.