

Metro Council hears string of pleas for funds

By Sheldon S. Shafer

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Representatives of one community agency after another paraded Thursday night before the Louisville Metro Council's Budget Committee to plead for money, but few are likely to get much help.

"We're hanging by our fingernails," said Diane Hague, spokeswoman for the Seven Counties' Sober Living program, an addiction-recovery program that sought help from the council.

In all, 55 people representing nearly as many organizations signed up to speak at the City Hall public hearing. Each was allotted up to 3 minutes to make their pitch, after which many were asked wide-ranging questions by one or more usually sympathetic council members.

Some 20 of the 26 council members attended at least part of the session. Committee chairwoman Marianne Butler, D-15th District, said several more were watching the proceedings from home on the metro TV station.

Mayor Greg Fischer recommended \$4.89 million to fund dozens of community agencies, mostly non-profits, in the upcoming 2011-12 budget that the council has been reviewing and must approve by June 30. The recommended [funding](#) followed almost exactly the advice of review committees composed of a cross-section of community officials.

Amid an uncertain economy and government funding shortages, however, the needs are probably several times that much. And Butler said in an interview during a break in the hearing that the council realizes the groups are confronting hard times.

Still, she said the council will almost certainly be unable to make any significant impact on the need.

"Maybe we can find a little money, shuffle our priorities and stretch our dollars" to help a few of the more desperate organizations, she said.

The appeals didn't fall on deaf ears. Nearly all the agencies received kind comments from one or more council members on the good work they're doing.

Among the pleas, Charles King of Project One, which provides summer jobs for young people, said he would be happy with money to put as few as 300 youngsters to work this summer, even though 1,400 have applied for jobs.

Project One had requested \$146,000, but the administration recommended no funding.

King said finding employment for young people was especially critical with the closing of the Kentucky Kingdom amusement park, which traditionally hired about 1,000 summer workers.

Having kids at work instead of on the streets would mean improved public safety, he said.

Some of Louisville's best-known charities made pitches for funding, including the Home of the Innocents, The Healing Place, the YMCA of Greater Louisville, Project Warm, the Salvation Army and several community ministries. Many spokesmen said their organizations have already made significant staff and service cuts to balance their books.

"We have nowhere else to cut," said Katie Receveur, director of social services for Volunteers of America, which sought funding for its emergency family shelter.

"More families and children are coming to our door in desperate need of help. ... Please help us," she said.

According to council budget information, Receveur's agency asked the city for \$132,000 for the family shelter, but the budget proposed only \$54,000.

Officials of several arts organizations also addressed the council.

Ted Nixon, board president of Actors Theatre of Louisville, sought to restore some funding for the organization's educational outreach program. Actors Theatre has developed a national reputation and has a significant positive economic impact on the community, Nixon said.

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