



## City Council unveils proposals to help Huntsville schools avoid layoffs

By Steve Doyle

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HUNTSVILLE, AL -- Huntsville City Councilmen Richard Showers and Bill Kling introduced competing plans Thursday night for tossing a financial lifeline to the strapped city school system.

Showers wants to give Huntsville schools 15 percent of all sales taxes collected by the city, up from 12.5 percent now. His idea would give school leaders about \$3 million more every year to help avoid teacher layoffs.

Kling, meanwhile, said about \$2.7 million in sales tax income earmarked for school building projects could be freed up for use in the classroom.

The council scheduled a work session for Thursday to begin debating the proposals.

"I think the gist of everything is that we want to assist the school district," said Showers, a retired educator. "We have always been able to work through our challenges and will do it again."

City schools are reeling from state budget cuts tied to the recession. Last week, Superintendent Ann Roy Moore suggested slashing \$22 million from the system's budget, with another \$2 million in cuts possible.

Her plan calls for laying off 215 teachers and 10 guidance counselors. Spending on bus transportation would also be reduced by at least \$1.5 million.

In a letter to council members and Mayor Tommy Battle dated Wednesday, Moore said the cuts "could result in larger classrooms, termination of some special programs, or negative changes in the school structure."

"We ask you at this time to seriously consider the proposal to increase funding for Huntsville City Schools," she wrote.

School board President Doug Martinson also signed the letter.

Noting that city government is facing a \$14 million deficit of its own, Battle said he's not sure how much more money the city can afford to give the school system.

He said school leaders should pass a resolution asking the city for help and outlining how they plan to overcome the budget woes.

"If you have a \$22 million deficit and you're getting \$3 million from the city, what are you doing about the other \$19 million?" Battle said. "There's still a big, big hole."



"We've got to all come up with some long-term solutions and not just slap a Band-Aid on it."

In other action Thursday, the council:

- Upheld a recommendation to suspend a public works supervisor for four weeks without pay. City Attorney Peter Joffrion said the employee, Jackie Burgreen, made "inappropriate remarks" to a resident;
- Postponed a vote on reclassifying five employees to a higher pay grade. Acting Human Resources Director Byron Thomas said job audits showed the workers, including an administrative aide in Battle's office due to skip ahead two pay grades, had taken on extra duties. The moves would cost taxpayers about \$40,000 per year. "We need more answers that are not there right now," said Showers, who asked for the delay.

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