

Contact: Amy Nolan, 215-3710

Mayor Bill Haslam announced today that hearings on budget requests for the city of Knoxville's 2004-2005 fiscal year will be open to the public.

"It's important to me these discussions are held in an open forum so citizens understand the financial challenges facing the city," Mayor Haslam said. "I'm committed to a responsible, balanced budget and want citizens to know the options available to us as we address services and revenues necessary for the city to operate in the year beginning July 1."

Mayor Haslam has asked senior directors and heads of agencies to determine the impact of a 6 percent reduction of their current budgets as a starting point in the process to determine where savings can be found.

The city of Knoxville, like other state and local governments, is facing a tight budget year because of a slow economy and increases in employee costs, especially health insurance and workers compensation insurance.

For the past three years, the city has raided its fund balance and reduced its size by half.

Since taking office in December, Mayor Haslam has committed to presenting City Council a balanced budget.

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In keeping with the Mayor's emphasis on a budget process that is accessible to the public, the city has also posted budget-related documents – including a detailed agenda for the budget hearings - on its web site at www.cityofknoxville.org/budget. Those documents also include information shared with City Council at its budget retreat in February and the city's current financial report.

Mayor Haslam is scheduled to present the budget on April 29.

Knoxville City Council will also hold public hearings on the budget before voting on its adoption in May.