**Letter to the Editor - October 27, 2017**

**Mayor's 2018 budget lacks civic imagination**

*Photo by Thinkstock*

We're all familiar with the headlines. "For the sixth time in seven years, Emanuel budget raises taxes," "Emanuel's short-term budget solutions will cost $1 billion in interest," "CPS borrows $275 million at sky-high interest rate."

Now that Mayor Rahm Emanuel has [**let us in on his 2018 budget plans**](http://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20171020/ISSUE07/171029974/emanuels-2018-budget-bolsters-chicago-finances-with-few-tax-increases), we need to step back for a bigger picture.

In 2016, the Chicago Tribune estimated that all of the mayor's taxes and fees amounted to about $1,700 a year for an average family. With the newly announced taxes and fees, that number goes up by about another $150.

We're constantly using regressive methods to raise money—whether it's through red-light camera penalties, usage fees, property taxes or other surcharges. We need to expand our civic imagination and open up a broad-based conversation on new, sustainable and progressive sources of savings and revenues for Chicago.

[**"Chicago is Not Broke: Funding the City We Deserve"**](https://www.amazon.com/Chicago-Broke-Funding-City-Deserve-ebook/dp/B01J4UPK4C) is a collection of short articles by local civic scholars and experts that describe a total of $5 billion in such sustainable revenue.

The book breaks the ideas into three buckets:

• Money lost to use due to corruption, bad bank deals and police abuse.

• Money hidden from us via the tax-increment financing program.

​• Money we are not collecting but should be.

All of the ideas in the book are in practice in America right now. Most of the solutions offered in the book can be enacted by Chicago without external permissions. But a few, like a financial transaction tax on LaSalle Street trades, would require state legislation, while a progressive income tax would require a constitutional amendment.

Let's discuss these ideas.

In the past—at least until 2016—there were always large public forums where the mayor and his top financial managers presented their plans and listened to public comments. These were tightly scripted but at least people heard the plans and had a chance to speak out.

I did not see any city-sponsored budget meetings last year or this. The 2017 budget passed 48-0. It looks like there will be little or no debate in City Council again.

Meanwhile, the book has triggered 55 public meetings since it was published in 2016. No major media outlet here (including Crain's) has reviewed the book or covered the civic work surrounding it. Over 6,200 people have attended these meetings and they would like to know why the ideas in the book have not been discussed beyond that or are likely to be.

I would urge all aldermen to vote "no" on the mayor's 2018 budget and to schedule a robust series of town halls to hear new ideas about how to pay for a Chicago that works for everyone.

*Tom Tresser, CivicLab, Chicago*

[www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20171027/ISSUE07/171029884/mayors-2018-budget-lacks-civic-imagination](http://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20171027/ISSUE07/171029884/mayors-2018-budget-lacks-civic-imagination)