

**City of Sheridan Budget Message**  
**May 16, 2005**  
**Dave Kinskey, Mayor**

This City Council and I have listened to you – the taxpayers – on your doorsteps, in your kitchens over a cup of coffee, in your workplaces. Your message has been loud and clear: ***the City must spend wisely and productively.***

A financially-healthy community can:

- pay its own way;
- map its own future, and create its own opportunities

Sheridan people are creative, positive, and hard-working. They expect the same of their leadership. You have quality leadership with this Council.

Our budget addresses the issues important to you: Rebuilding roads, cleaning up the town, creating an environment for high-paying jobs and affordable housing, planning for the future – and preserving, for the next generation, the greatest place in the world to live and raise a family.

Four months ago, this Council and I set out on a journey – to understand every aspect of this City’s operations. In 33 work sessions over three months we “left no stone unturned.” Here is some of what we learned:

- The City budget we inherited is in the third year of three continuous years of deficit spending
- Unless the deficit is controlled, the City will run out of cash
- The City budget has grown two times faster than can be explained by inflation or the growth of the City
- General fund budgets for infrastructure, maintenance and for future needs have been slashed
- To “make room” in the City budget for big pay and benefit increases, ordinary operating expenses had, at times, been shifted to the One Cent Optional Sales Tax fund

A few examples are typical of the problems we found:

- 87 miles of Sheridan streets are overdue for maintenance. The budget we inherited was enough to fix three miles.
- Some ordinary operating expenses – such as office supplies and uniforms – had been cut from the City’s budget, and the money taken from the One Cent Optional Sales tax fund.
- In the distant past, the City budget paid for trucks and equipment needed for ordinary operations. In some instances, these items, too, had been slashed

from the City's budget, and the money taken instead from the One Cent Optional Sales Tax Fund.

***When you, the taxpayers, approved the Optional One Cent Tax, Subsidizing City deficits was not the purpose you had in mind.*** That tax is intended to do nice things for the community – *not* to underwrite fiscal irresponsibility. ***That fiscal “shell game” must stop.*** And it will. With this Council, with this budget.

It's not just Sheridan. The same thing has happened in other places in Wyoming. We have the opportunity, as a community and a Council, to be among the first in the state to put a stop to it.

Call it Fiscal Fitness if you like.

It won't be easy – or fast. It took a long time to dig the hole. It will take a while to dig out. This Council has already begun the difficult work. This Council has already made some hard decisions. They are to be commended for their commitment and courage. There remains much work ahead.

I am pleased to present this \$10 million ***balanced*** budget. This is a big turn-around. We started with projections of a deficit exceeding a quarter million dollars. This budget calls for a modest surplus.

Our \$10 million budget for Fiscal 2005 is balanced in two senses:

- First, we have made sure that we live within our means – that revenues exceed expenses – that we spend less than we bring in.
- Secondly, and very importantly, it is balanced in the sense that we have weighed a variety of competing needs. We must weigh the needs of employees, with the interests of the taxpayers; we must balance the desires of the present with the needs of the future.

Here are some key points of the budget that I would like to highlight for you today:

**Road Repair.** We have tripled the streets maintenance budget to \$580,000. Our streets have suffered expensive neglect for too long.

**Town Clean Up.** We have heard it from the taxpayers over and over again – let's get this town cleaned up. Let's get junked cars off the streets. Our budget includes more than \$100,000 to do so.

**Law and Order.** Our citizens want the traffic laws enforced. Our citizens want “community policing.” Our citizens want to stop the scourge of methamphetamine that

has a foothold in our precious community. Our police handle over 11,000 incidents a year – so many that they don't have time to file the paperwork on every call. Yet, we fund only three police officers per shift. This budget increases the number of officers on duty.

**Planning for the Future.** We must move from a reactive mode – to a proactive plan. And, we must do it in a way that doesn't “scare off” the right kinds of development with unnecessary red-tape. Our budget will update our codes and plans.

**High Paying Jobs.** Government cannot create good jobs – but it can prevent them from being created. Getting our City house in order is “Job #1” to job creation. Still, we need to do more. We must support those in our community working to attract new opportunity.

**Affordable Housing.** The best thing the City can do for affordable housing is to fix our streets, water and sewer system. In addition, this budget supports community efforts to establish innovative programs for affordable housing.

**Water, Sewer and Solid Waste.** Council recently voted for modest increases in these rates. *Not one dime goes to salary increases.* The increase goes to fixing our infrastructure.

**Employee Compensation.** Attracting and retaining the right people requires compensation competitive with the Sheridan market, and that rewards merit. This Council's budget balances that – and our need to be wise stewards of the taxpayers' money.

**Equipment and Facilities.** As mentioned, over the years the City's budget slashed ordinary expenses like buying equipment or fixing buildings. Those expenses were shifted – improperly in our view – to the Optional One Cent Sales Tax fund. This budget halts that practice. ***The City must take its hand out of the One Cent cookie jar.***

Our budget places \$400,000 into an operational equipment account. This money will be dedicated for use to replace equipment and for similar expenses. Having done so, this budget moves over approximately \$300,000 in improper expense *out of* the One Cent Optional Sales Tax and puts it back where it belongs – in the City's budget.

***When this tax comes up for renewal, this Council and I want to be able to look every voter in the eye and tell them – the one cent money will go for your benefit, for the purposes you vote for – not to subsidize reckless spending.***

**Optional One Cent Sales Tax.** An important aspect of our budget is the proper use of the Optional One-Cent Sales Tax.

This is the tax that, historically, we recognize from the little green “Penny Power” plaques hanging on the “nice to haves” for our town – playgrounds and parks, walking and bike trails, the Senior Center, the library.

And more – Sheridan is the “volunteeringest” town in America. Our budget uses this penny to help those helping others. People helping seniors, children and families. People helping with historic preservation and promoting art. People placing lost pets with loving homes. And on and on it goes, too numerous to name them all – good people, good work – supported, in some part, by this Council and the one cent sales tax.

One project in particular I must mention - the walking and bike path system. Right now, there are too many places where it starts or stops – in the middle of nowhere. This budget puts \$200,000 of Optional One Cent money to get it done. Hopefully, this money can be doubled or tripled by matching grants. If so, that would put us on the path to finishing the trails within 4 years.

**Water.** Finally, this important note on that most precious of natural resources – water. We recently have been blessed with water – perhaps too much so. Thankfully, nobody was hurt. Still, we must remain focused on the fact that Sheridan – to thrive as a community – must have a long term water supply plan. The Sheridan Area Water Supply System – or SAWS – is a partnership of the City and the County. SAWS has over \$3 million earmarked for water supply acquisition – with no plan in place as to how to go about using that money. This Council will continue to work productively with our partners, the County Commission, to see that a plan for long term water supply is designed and implemented

This budget reflects a months-long journey by this Council. It reflects what we have heard from you. It is a budget that spends wisely and productively – a budget for the future.

We will continue to listen to you – and to reflect your concerns in the budget – as we start the process of hearings and work sessions next week. We welcome your input. After all, it’s your money.