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## De Blasio Calls \$82.1 Billion Budget 'Boring,' But Says It Protects City

By Jeff Mays

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Mayor Bill de Blasio on Thursday described his \$82.1 billion preliminary budget as a safe plan devoid of flashy, big-ticket items that braces the city in case of an economic downturn.

"Boring is good sometimes," de Blasio said of his fiscal year 2017 budget plan. "We don't need to always have splashy new things when we feel the choices we've made are going to have a huge impact."

De Blasio said there are good signs of progress in the city, including 10 percent growth in the tech sector, 220,000 new jobs over the past two years and an increase of 2 million tourists in 2015 over 2014.

The mayor also highlighted the city's financial planning with \$4.9 billion in reserves this year.

"This budget is based on reserves to protect against a downturn because in a downturn we will be on our own," the mayor said.

But that doesn't mean there won't be any new spending.

There is a 4.5 percent increase in the budget. The mayor laid out plans to spend \$115 million to boost the minimum wage to \$15 for tens of thousands of city workers, and \$5.4 million to expand FDNY ambulance tours in Upper Manhattan, Queens and The Bronx in an effort to boost response times.

He also called for a 30 percent increase in spending on park security with \$5.3 million going to the hiring of 67 new park enforcement officers.

Under de Blasio's budget, the city would spend \$868 million to add 11,800 additional seats in schools as part of its five-year capital plan.

The mayor also addressed bailing out the financially troubled NYC Health + Hospitals, which serves one in six of all New Yorkers, almost all of whom are uninsured or have Medicaid. De Blasio said the city will develop a plan for the group, similar to the one used to save the New York City Housing Authority.

The mayor's proposed budget sets aside \$600 million to help fully fund the city's pension obligations.



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Among other new spending plans the mayor announced Thursday:

- \$3 million to expand the NYPD's ShotSpotter gunshot detection technology. The coverage area will double and expand to all five boroughs
- \$79.4 million to fund ThriveNYC and NYC Safe, two mental health efforts that will fund treatment and track those mentally ill who pose a danger to the public
- \$47 million to purchase a new 4,500 passenger Staten Island Ferry. The current ferries range in age from 34 to 51 years old
- \$12.1 million to hire 327 new traffic agents and add 100 additional cameras to bus lanes
- \$53.7 million for a variety of initiatives to address homelessness, including shelter repair funds, helping single adults stay in their apartments and paying for the first of 15,000 promised units of supportive housing

While de Blasio touted the plan as fiscally safe, Comptroller Scott Stringer's December budget analysis said the city's surplus is not large enough and should be 12 to 18 percent of the operating budget "in order to be prepared for the next financial downturn."

Stringer spokesman Eric Sumberg said the comptroller will examine the details of de Blasio's preliminary budget and will present a new analysis in a few weeks.

Maria Doulis, vice-president of the Citizens Budget Commission, said it's good to see that de Blasio is aware of the possibility of an economic downturn but she would like to see the budget reserves increase.

"There are new needs in the budget that need to be addressed but the city needs to better self-fund those priorities with savings," said Doulis.

De Blasio said he was considering a "program to eliminate the gap" — or PEG — that would designate a savings amount each city agency would be expected to achieve.

Also lurking in the background is the possibility of more than \$1 billion a year in new city costs due to proposals from Gov. Andrew Cuomo to cut state funding to Medicaid and the City University of New York.

After including the proposed cuts in his budget address last week, Cuomo said they were about the city and state working together to find spending efficiencies which "won't cost New York City a penny."

De Blasio said Thursday that he was taking Cuomo "at his word" based on conversations with the governor and Cuomo's public comments.

"I will certainly hold him to that," de Blasio said.



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The possible spending increases were not accounted for in the preliminary budget.