

Conklin: RCSD 'doing a miserable job'

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City Council signed off Tuesday on more than \$1.4 billion in city and school district spending — covering everything from firetrucks to walking trails, and teachers to police officers. The budget vote is a necessary formality that provides a measure of priorities, and it's also a platform for grievances.

Retiring three-term City Council member Carolee Conklin, who has led the Finance Committee since 2008, used her last budget votes to voice her displeasure with the school district's \$883 million spending plan. The measure passed 8-1. 'I don't want to sound like I'm against kids or education,' she said. 'But they are doing a miserable job. ... We're turning out kids that can't get jobs. They absolutely refuse to face the reality of the need to start closing schools.'

Mayoral candidates James Sheppard and Rachel Barnhart, meanwhile, took aim at Mayor Lovely Warren's \$525 million city budget proposal, which passed Council on a vote of 9-0.

City Council votes on both budgets because the city has taxing and bonding authority for both entities.

Sheppard said Warren's plan balances the budget by pushing off spending on neighborhood projects and pulling from city reserves. Barnhart has said the budget hurts businesses and renters with a commercial tax rate increase. Both have criticized Warren for not securing more state and federal aid. Warren highlighted a drop in the residential tax rate, adding that homeowners and merchants are paying among the lowest rates since at least 2000-01. The city's bonding rating has increased, meaning better interest rates on borrowing, she said, and the city has maintained services despite tight budgets.

In other business, City Council approved legislation making it illegal for landlords to reject potential renters solely because they plan to use Section 8 housing vouchers or other public assistance. The vote was 8-1.



Carolee A. Conklin