



# Energetic crowd packs Orléans Theatre for budget meeting

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The message was loud and clear at last Thursday evening's public consultation regarding the City of Ottawa's 2009 draft budget.

"Don't cut anything," said Diane O'Neill, executive director of Aladdin Daycare, as the packed house inside the Orléans Theatre at 255 Centrum Boulevard erupted in cheers of support.

As the city figures out ways to balance a \$35 million dollar shortfall, which includes a potential 4.9 per cent tax increase, east end residents voiced their concerns over proposed cuts to arts, culture, heritage funding, sports rinks, child care spaces and transit routes, and the possible increases in sports fees.

The lively and energetic

crowd posed questions to City of Ottawa representatives, including City Treasurer Marian Simulik, Alain Mercier, director of OC Transpo, and east end councillors Bob Monette (Ward 1 - Orléans), Rainer Bloess (Ward 2 - Innes), Michel Bellemare (Ward 11 - Beacon Hill - Cyrville) and Rob Jellett (Ward 19 - Cumberland).

"We need to hear from as many people as possible," said Coun. Jellett. "None of us up here want to cut any programs."

Simulik told the crowd that a satisfaction survey is sent out to all Ottawa residents, asking them to rank the importance of several services and programs.

"We are not asking ev-

eryone if they don't like the arts," she said. "And it's unfortunate what the numbers show, but a lot of people say that we can do a lot less with the arts."

But if the public meeting proved anything, survey results meant nothing, with arts supporters, young and old, asking the tough questions.

Several residents wondered if there was a disconnect between city staff and council, after Coun. Bellemare said that "this was city staff's budget, not council's."

"Council does set guidelines for staff as far as the budget is concerned," said Coun. Bloess. "We tell them to bridge the gap, and there are some harsh options in



East end councillors Rainer Bloess (left) and Michel Bellemare (right) listen to a question during last Thursday's public consultation meeting regarding the City of Ottawa's 2009 draft budget at the Orléans Theatre.

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