Public health gets $25.8 million. The city will invest $4.1 million on housing and human resources while the same amount will go to help homeless residents

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COLUMBUS – The reelection of Michael Coleman to a fourth term as mayor was not the only historic thing that happened in Columbus, lately. Also historic was the number of Columbus Police officers and firefighters who soared to unprecedented heights.

That increase reflects Coleman's huge emphasis on fighting crime in a city where the menacing problem of violence and gang activities got him deeply involved in the efforts to combat it in recent years. He also feels the problem demands budgetary focus and resources.

For the first time in the city's history, Columbus will have a force of 1,929 police officers and 1,563 firefighters by the end of 2012.

In his budget of $735.5 million recently submitted to the Columbus City Council, Coleman made public safety his chief priority, allocating $505 million for that department where the Division of Police gets $273 million and Division of Fire $217 million.

Last week, the council began hearing on the budget. City Auditor Hugh Dorrian expressed the view that the total budget would most certainly end up being more than the mayor proposed by about $800,000. And by the time the council completes deliberation on it ready for vote in February, Dorian said that the numbers will likely be revised again, recommending that any windfall increase in revenue should go to boost funding for the homeless community.

Coleman's Finance Director Paul Rakosky knows why there are fluctuations in the figures. He explained that the likely increases would come from the new reality of revenue projections, where in his view, "some revenues are coming in better than… projections."

All told, 69 percent of the General Revenue Operating fund was allocated to public safety but Coleman explained that while that emphasis corralled the lion's share of the budget, it was still a balanced package of proposals that invested in the needs of the city while positioning government for dealing with the uncertainties of the future.

"The tough choices that we and our citizens have made over the past several years combined with the ingenuity of our entrepreneurs have put us in the strong position we are in today," said Coleman. "This is why we are able to invest in our neighborhoods today even as we set aside resources for tomorrow."

With state budgetary cuts always a looming source of uncertainty, Coleman appeared prepared for it, stashing away $10 million for that in the 2013 budget.

A big part of Coleman's proposals was the $30 million that went to the Department of Recreation and Parks to fund the city's 240 public parks, recreation centers and facilities, plus swimming pools and more than 50 miles of trails.

A highlight for the agency was the $1.5 million proposed for Application for Pride, Purpose and Success (APPS), a program designed to intervene in the lives of troubled young people. Coleman said that part of the money will go to expand the program in 2012 by forming and dispatching "Street Teams" into the most troubled neighborhoods to work with young people.

It wasn't all safety, however. Coleman proposed $33.9 million in spending for refuse collection, snow removal, and recycling.

The city's job creation orb will be funded at $23 million through the Department of Development for supporting activities such as regional economic development, Downtown development and small business development. Looking to boost the marketing of Columbus to outsiders, Coleman allocated $6.4 million to Experience Columbus, where the goal of attracting people, businesses and jobs to the city will be supported.

Improving Columbus neighborhoods is also important to Coleman. That's why he increased funding for safeguarding them by $200,000, raising the money for that purpose to $800,000, including funding for the city's four Neighborhood Pride Centers and 63 Code Enforcement Officers.

Public health gets $25.8 million. The city will invest $4.1 million on housing and human resources while the same amount will go to help homeless residents through the Community Shelter Board and Rebuilding Lives program.

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