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NEWS RELEASE

Oct. 3, 2018 – For Immediate Release

Dubuque Offers ‘Balancing Act’ Budget Simulator

DUBUQUE, Iowa – The City of Dubuque is offering residents and stakeholders a new budget simulation tool that enables them to balance their own version of Dubuque’s city budget. This new tool is available at www.cityofdubuque.org/budget and promotes transparency and increases public engagement in the development of the City’s annual budget.

The Balancing Act software is an interactive tool designed to share information with residents and stakeholders about the City’s budget and educate them on key financial issues. It also provides the City with informed input to help staff and elected officials make the tough choices that are necessary to balance a city budget. The simulation enables users to experience the same constraints that cities face when balancing an annual budget.

“The budget simulator challenges people to balance their own version of the City’s budget, subject to the same constraints City Council members face annually when considering the City’s recommended operating and capital budgets,” said City of Dubuque Budget Director Jennifer Larson. “In doing so, they learn about the complex trade-offs necessary to balance the general fund budget and balancing increases in certain programs and services with cuts in others.”

Using a smartphone, tablet or computer, simulation users choose where money should be spent among nine categories: capital projects, community and economic development, culture and recreation, general government, health and social services, municipal services fully supported by user fees, public safety, streets and infrastructure, and transportation services. Exploring each category provides additional information as well as opportunities for users to provide feedback and share information on social networks.

Just as the City is required to have a balanced budget, the Balancing Act simulation requires users to balance their spending with available revenue. The software details the City's five revenue sources: taxes, charges for services and permits, intergovernmental revenue, miscellaneous revenue, and investments and property. Users are able to explore each source and adjust rates and fees to increase or decrease revenue as well as provide feedback and share information on social networks.

The tool can also generate a "taxpayer receipt," to demonstrate to residents where their City property and sales tax dollars go. Residents anonymously input basic data (income, age, value of home, etc.) to generate a customized estimate of their City taxes paid. The customized receipt demonstrates how much in City taxes goes to police, fire, library, parks and other City services based on the data provided by residents.

The Balancing Act simulation tool is another method for residents and stakeholders to provide input on the City budget. The public is also invited to submit ideas at www.cityofdubuque.org/budget and attend a budget public input session at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 14, in the City Council Chambers on the second floor of the Historic Federal Building at 350 W. Sixth St.

For those seeking detailed information on the City's operating and capital budgets, the City also offers the "Open Budget" website to explore and visually interact with the budgets. It is available at <http://dollarsandcents.cityofdubuque.org> and is designed to help people better understand the City's budgets.

For more information on the Balancing Act simulation or the City of Dubuque budget, visit www.cityofdubuque.org/budget or contact City of Dubuque Budget Director Jennifer Larson at 563.589.4110.

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