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Giuliani and Council closer on fiscal cut

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and RUSS BUETTNER
DAILY NEWS WRITERS

Mayor Giuliani said yesterday that negotiations with the City Council over his plan to cut the city budget by $766 million progressed "dramatically" last week.

"I met with the speaker a few days ago, and while no agreement was reached, the gap closed dramatically," Giuliani said during a news conference in Manhattan.

But a City Council spokesman said there remain critical differences between the sides.

"We're pleased with the mayor's optimism and flexibility," said Jordan Barowitz, a Council spokesman. "However, there's still a significant gap that must be negotiated."

Giuliani proposed the cuts two weeks ago as a first step to plug a $1.2 billion gap in the city's $38 billion budget — a gap caused by the slumping economy and the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The mayor's proposal included slicing $119 million from children's services, $27 million from libraries, $21 million from museums and other cultural institutions and $4.6 million from parks.

The Council initially threatened to vote down the entire plan unless Giuliani bargained.

Barowitz said yesterday that the Council would go along with most of Giuliani's plan, recognizing that corporate layoffs and dwindling tourism had hit the city hard.

But the Council is resisting $120 million of Giuliani's cuts, including those to senior services, libraries, parks, the City University of New York and infant mortality programs, Barowitz said.

All of the cuts at issue were to programs that the Council fought to restore to this fiscal-year budget during negotiations in June, Barowitz said.

"This isn't political pork," he said. "These are programs vital to the quality of life of many New Yorkers."

A Giuliani spokeswoman declined to discuss the negotiations beyond the mayor's remarks.

The Council technically has until mid-January — 30 days from when Giuliani presented his plan — to vote on the cuts. But a vote is likely by Dec. 31 because both the current Council and Giuliani leave office on that day.

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