

## 3 Minutes with Baltimore City Councilman Bill Cole

Stephen Janis, Examiner, September 16, 2008

Baltimore City Councilman Bill Cole chairs the Special Committee on Property Tax Relief. The committee held packed public hearings on Thursday on plans to cut the city's property tax. Afterward Cole shared his thoughts with The Examiner on the prospects for property tax relief.

### **What are the biggest obstacles the council faces as it tries to cut property taxes in Baltimore?**



The biggest challenge is there is currently no statutory way for us to dedicate funding. If we find \$7 million that can be applied toward a property tax cut, the only way it happens is if the mayor agrees that that money be applied to tax relief, so we need the administration to commit to dedicating those funds or it will simply get spent.

### **Are there ways to increase revenues for tax reduction without raising taxes elsewhere?**

Yes. For example, the state and the city have cross-referenced records and found that 1,700 properties may be incorrectly getting the benefit of the Homestead Property Tax Cap. Once they have verified that those properties should not have received the credit they will attempt to go back and collect back taxes. That money could be used to reduce the property tax rate.

### **You are considering raising the hotel occupancy tax and using the money to reduce property taxes. Do you think enough consideration has been given to actually cutting spending?**

We didn't spend a lot of time discussing how to reduce the size of government because that was not what we were asked to do. But I think one would have to be naive to say you couldn't find savings in city government, particularly when our budget grew 8 percent last year.