

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

CHICAGO CITY COUNCIL

Aldermen give boot to tax hike



Mayor back to drawing board after unanimous rebuke of plan to close yawning hole in budget

By Jake Sheridan
Chicago Tribune

The Chicago City Council emphatically voted down Mayor Brandon Johnson's plan to hike property taxes by \$300 million Thursday, creating a yawning hole in the city's 2025 budget that must now be closed.

Aldermen voted 50-0 in a rare unanimous roll-call vote to discard

the tax hike in a special meeting that lasted just minutes and included no debate. The council's decisive rejection gives aldermen leverage they have rarely enjoyed in ongoing budget negotiations: Whatever comes next, it won't be Johnson's original plan.

The property hike proved wildly unpopular with constituents, aldermen have said. But its demise forces the council and

mayor to now come up with new answers. While many aldermen joined the mayor to argue Chicago must find new revenue and avoid layoffs, others said the body must make major budget cuts.

"The only way you are going to make real structural reform here is by making some deep cuts," downtown Ald. Brendan Reilly, 42nd, said after the vote.

Reilly said the mayor must now negotiate with a broader swath of the City Council and called the

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Mayor Brandon Johnson holds a news conference after a special meeting of the Chicago City Council called to address his proposed \$300 million property tax hike on Thursday. **TERRENCE ANTONIO JAMES/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Board turns to charter closures

Special meeting gives public opportunity to address charged issue

By Nell Salzman,
Sarah Macaraeg and
Ikram Mohamed
Chicago Tribune

In the latest development in a monthslong battle between the Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Teachers Union, the school board held a special meeting Thursday to address the impending closures of several charter schools.

The meeting, which was still underway Thursday evening, allowed audience members to closely watch another issue: the hiring of outside legal counsel to represent the board. Mayor Brandon Johnson's allies deem the help necessary as an accountability mechanism to help the school board have independence from the general counsel that reports to both the board and Chief Executive Officer Pedro Martinez.

Last month, Acero charter network leadership announced the closure of seven of its 15 schools, citing financial constraints, declining enrollment and inadequate space to ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Afterward, Martinez said he hadn't been made aware prior to the charter leadership's announcement that the schools were moving forward with closures.

But the district said the Acero closures have garnered more involvement from outside politicians than other charter school closings.

"Partners, including City Hall and our labor partners, have not been involved with the district's response to other charters that have voluntarily closed doors," said a CPS spokesperson in a statement.

Since 2013, 25 charter schools in CPS have closed. Of those, 12 were self-directed closures (similar to Acero's

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People ride the Yellow Line CTA train from Howard to the Dempster-Skokie station in Skokie on Nov. 1. **TESS CROWLEY/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

SWIFT JUDGMENT

By Sarah Freishtat
Chicago Tribune

The CTA instructor was crammed into a seat on the back end of a snowplow paused on the tracks when he saw the Yellow Line train round the curve headed toward them that November day nearly a year ago.

Another employee sitting next to the instructor jumped up and said, "Oh, my God, oh, my God," the instructor told federal, state and CTA officials days after the crash, a copy of a transcript of the interview shows. The train slammed into the machine and the second employee "flew out the window," even as the instructor tried to grab him, he said. The instructor hit his head and was

One year after Yellow Line crash, effects linger for Skokie, CTA and some riders skeptical that changes have been made

knocked unconscious for a few seconds.

When the instructor awoke, he went to check on the employee "praying that he was still alive," he told investigators. "I could hear him screaming down there on the right-of-way."

The instructor's description of the crash is part of the National Transportation Safety Board's investigation docket, a collection of more than 2,500 pages of interview transcripts, technical documents and analysis about the Nov. 16, 2023, collision that left some two dozen passengers and employees injured. The NTSB is still investigating what caused the crash between the train and the snowplow, which was on the tracks for

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MICHAEL MADIGAN TRIAL

Jurors hear call where ex-speaker pulls big strings

By Jason Meisner
and Megan Crepeau
Chicago Tribune

State Rep. Jaime Andrade said earlier this year in a Tribune interview he didn't know whether former House Speaker Michael Madigan had helped get his wife a job with the secretary of state in 2018.

On Thursday, however, the

jury in Madigan's corruption trial heard a wiretapped call in which Andrade, a Chicago Democrat, was told by Madigan's longtime confidant in no uncertain terms who had pulled the strings.

"The speaker jumped all over it, so that's good," Michael McClain told Andrade in the August 2018 call, which was played for the first time in court.

Though there was nothing ille-

gal about Madigan's favor, the episode is being held up by prosecutors as more evidence of the power and influence wielded by Madigan and, by proxy, McClain, during the time frame of the alleged racketeering conspiracy.

Madigan's lawyers had objected to the calls being presented to the jury, saying they could be prejudicial, but U.S. District Judge John Robert Blakey ruled before the trial

began that they were relevant.

Andrade could not immediately be reached for comment.

The recordings related to Andrade were an aberration in a week of testimony that was otherwise focused on one of the central accusations of the trial: an alleged scheme by ComEd to extend a stream of benefits to Madigan and

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Chicago's Top Workplaces

In addition to a look at the city's best places to land a job, our annual Top Workplaces report examines why, amid return-to-office mandates, employees are seemingly more disenchanted than they were even in the darkest days of the pandemic. We also dig into what the most effective workplaces are doing to fight back against this trend. **Special section inside**



An app for Bulls, Hawks

With the Bulls and Blackhawks seasons in full swing and Comcast carriage negotiations stalled, the new Chicago Sports Network is moving forward this week with its direct-to-consumer streaming service, bypassing the pay-TV middleman to reach blacked-out viewers for a monthly fee. **Business**

Kennedy is HHS pick

President-elect Donald Trump says he will nominate anti-vaccine activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, putting a man whose views public health officials have decried as dangerous in charge of the massive federal agency. **Nation & World**

